

Candidate self presentation in the 2008 American presidential election

- A qualitative study of the self presentation strategies and appeals to national identity pursued by John McCain and Barack Obama

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements	5
1. Introduction	6
1.2 Research questions and aims.....	7
1.3 Value of research.....	7
1.4 Structure of thesis	9
2. Literature review	10
2.1 Overview	10
2.3 Self presentation.....	10
2.4 Voter decision making processes.....	13
2.5 Social identity theory.....	15
2.6 National identity theories	17
2.7 American national identity.....	20
2.8 Summary.....	26
3. Method	27
3.1 Design	27
3.1.1 Qualitative	27
3.1.2 Inductive.... ..	27
3.1.3 Textual analysis	28
3.1.4 Narrative theory	28
3.1.5 Discourse theory.....	29
3.1.6 Rhetorical analysis	30
3.2 Choice of materials	31
4. Analysis	33
4.1 McCain speech at the American Legion	33
4.2 McCain speech at National Security round table meeting.....	38
4.3 Obama speech at the Clinton Global Initiative	43
4.4 Obama speech National Security Avail	47
4.5 McCain interview on CBS	53
4.6 McCain interview with CNN	58
4.7 Obama interview on CBS	63
4.8 Obama interview on the O'Reilly Show	68

5. Discussion	73
5.1 Revisiting the research aims	73
5.2 Summary of analysis findings	73
5.3 Self presentation	74
5.3.1 Agent of change	74
5.3.2 A man of honour	76
5.3.3 Discourse of masculinity	77
5.3.4 Discourse of fear	79
5.3.5 Tensions in McCain's campaign	80
5.3.6 Incorporating temporal events	82
5.4 Social identity	83
5.4.1 The AMERICAN candidate	83
5.4.2 Visions of America.....	87
5.4.3 Religion	89
5.5 Constraints on strategies of self presentation	91
5.6 Evaluation of study	93
5.7 Summary and broader implications	94
References	95
List of texts	98

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1.1 Introduction

November 4th 2008. It is the day of the 56. American presidential election and the day that marks the end of a long campaign for the two candidates; John McCain from the Republican Party and Barack Obama representing the Democratic Party. They have been campaigning for well over a year and have prepared for it even longer, first to clinch their party's nomination as presidential candidates and then to win the presidency. They have held countless speeches, participated in innumerable interviews, sparred against each other in debates and been featured in a vast amount of political advertisements. In short they have engaged in non-stop self presentation to convince the American people to vote for them. This day marks the end of their quest for the presidency where one will concede his loss and the other will be announced as the president-elect and inaugurated January 20th as the 44th president of the United States of America. As the evening progresses it soon becomes clear that Barack Obama that will secure the needed number of electoral votes and he is declared the new President-elect.

The American presidential elections excite and fascinate people way beyond the borders of America which says something about the unique position America has in world. Who is elected president of America has repercussions world wide and seldom has this been more evident than during the presidency of George W. Bush. Bush's approval ratings dropped steadily after his re-election in 2004 and in 2008 America was ready for a change. So was the majority of the world community. The fascination with American presidential elections is evident in the vast amount of research and literature that seeks to explain and predict election outcomes. The immense focus on American elections is closely associated with the mediatisation of society and politics where the every move of politicians running for office is monitored, analysed and presented to the people. There is little room for mistakes. Self presentation then has become the cornerstone of any candidate's campaign, making a study of candidate self presentation vital to understanding election outcomes.

1.2 Research question and aims

The research question of this thesis is:

What signifies and drives candidate self presentation in the 2008 American presidential election?

The primary aims of the thesis are:

- To explore the phenomenon of candidate self presentation strategies as pursued by John McCain and Barack Obama in the American presidential election 2008, by way of textual analysis of candidate speeches and interviews from the time of the Democratic National Convention in late August 2008 up until election day on November 4th, 2008.
- To gain insight into how the candidates appeal to the voters by focusing on social identities like the American national identity.
- To establish the ways in which presidential candidates overwhelmingly appeal to emotions.

A focus on candidate self presentation provides crucial insight into the ambition and motivation of the speaker, the audience that speaker is trying to reach and the context the self presentation is situated within. Looking at self presentation by candidates therefore requires a multi-faceted focus and the three variables of speaker, audience and context interact in this thesis. In terms of texts, I have decided to focus on written transcripts of oral presentations, more specifically speeches and interviews, two from each candidate. Further I have decided to concentrate on texts that deal with foreign policy and national security. I found it made sense to focus on such texts because of my background, personal interests and because one of the themes I wanted to explore was American national identity. It seemed likely that there would be more references to national identity in texts that spoke about America and its position in the world, rather than in texts that dealt with the technicalities of the American economy. This does not mean however that I intend to assess the foreign policy platforms presented

by the candidates. I rather want to look at how they illuminate self presentation strategies and provide crucial insight into the discourses that inform and drive the candidates' narrative.

1.3 Value of research

Research on American election campaigns tends to remain within one discipline whether that is political science or cognitive psychology. Research also often takes a deductive approach which starts off with a clear theoretical framework and tests it out on a real phenomenon. To break from deductive research with a singular focus, I have decided to use texts produced in the campaign as my starting off point and let them guide the analysis and subsequently the theories and literature needed to explain the findings. As a consequence this thesis draws on a number of academic fields such as social cognition, social identity theory, so-called campaign science inspired by marketing, historical accounts and theories on the American national identity. This multidisciplinary approach is in part what makes my research original. I am also drawing on narrative and discourse theory as candidates tend to present themselves in narratives and those narratives are constructed to a certain extent on the background of societal and political discourses that operate in the American society. The aim is not first and foremost to generalise but rather to add a dimension to the multitude of research that exists on American presidential elections. The focus on foreign policy and national security also provides a new perspective as it investigates how America views itself in relation to the rest of the world. American presidential campaigns are too complex for me to conclude that Barack Obama presented himself better than John McCain and therefore won. But I do believe important insights into self presentation strategies and emotional appeals to social identities can give some clues as to whether the candidate is able to connect with the voter. It is after all on the basis of this connection that people place their vote.

1.4 Structure:

The thesis starts with a literature review where I account for and evaluate theories of self presentation, information processing models, theories on emotional appeals, social identity theory, national identity and finally American national identity. These are all areas of academic work I found helpful in explaining and contextualising the findings of my analysis. As the process of analysis was integrative, insights from these fields also shed new light on passages of text that had made little sense before. After the literature review, I turn my attention to the methodology chosen for this thesis. The study sits comfortably within the qualitative tradition of research as I have decided to use textual analysis, drawing on narrative, discourse and rhetorical theory in order to investigate candidate strategies of self presentation. I decided that drawing on multiple forms of analysis would afford me the dynamic and flexible approach I felt the research question required. The method section also accounts for choice of materials. I have analysed eight texts for this thesis, two interviews and two speeches from each candidate. The analysis section thus consists of eight separate analyses. In the discussion I return to the aims of this project, provide a summary of my findings in the analyses before I in detail discuss the strategies of self presentation found and the appeal to social identities. Finally I evaluate the thesis, sum up my conclusions and make some comments as to the broader implications of the study and suggestions for future research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Overview:

I will begin the literature review by focusing on theories of self presentation launched in recent decades. Then I will move on to evaluate the usefulness of models of decision making processing and the power of emotional appeals in presidential elections. I will continue by covering the elements of social identity theory that are relevant to this thesis before I narrow my focus to look at national identities and finally specifically the American national identity.

2.2 Self presentation:

Since Erving Goffman published his book “The presentation of self in everyday life” in 1959, great attention has been granted the topic of self presentation. Goffman’s book as the title suggests deals with self presentation on a daily basis, but other areas have since been explored including politicians running for office. This is a different form of self presentation as it is a public self that is being expressed and one that will only include selected elements of the private self. How John McCain and Barack Obama choose to present themselves in an interview on national television gives us few answers about their private selves, but should give us important clues as to the political, public identity they are constantly forming and presenting throughout a presidential election campaign as well as the greater social context they operate within. Schlenker (2003) defines self presentation as goal directed impression management aimed at controlling information in order to influence the impressions of ourselves formed by an audience. When the goal then is to appeal to as many voters as possible and inspire them sufficiently to vote for you, the self presentation will necessary conform to what will appeal to the constituents both in terms of mannerisms, appearance and opinions. The study of self presentation seeks to examine how people as active agents try to shape the attitudes of their audience through presentations of self-relevant information and how people respond to this.

Traditional views on self presentation embody two main motivations for how people want others to see them; self glorification and self consistency. Swann (1983) argues that people have a cognitive need for order and consistency which means that feedback that corresponds to own perceptions is important. Both these theories emphasize the individual and self concept/evaluation and thus offer a limited and static view. Schlenker (2003) argues in favour of a more interactive view where self presentation is a constant conversation between the actor, the audience and the situation/context. In terms of political self presentation this seems more appropriate as political self presentation very much happens in the public arena where communication is very strategic and not for the purpose to enhancing self esteem or for receiving feedback consistent with your own perception of yourself. The public self is very versatile and will be adapted if the audience (the voters) or the situation requires it. Jones (1967) states that self presentation is more likely to be tailored to the audience if the audience is vital for achieving a desired outcome- nowhere is this more potent than in an election campaign.

Self presentation is first and foremost based on direct communication by the actor but there are indirect forms of self presentation as well. One of these forms can be to bask in the reflected glory of the accomplishments of others. A reverse form of this is to distance yourself from someone you might otherwise be likened to if they have done things likely to be viewed negatively by your audience. John McCain tried for the duration of his candidacy to distance himself from President Bush who had low approval ratings. Often actors will blast the accomplishments of opponents and this is particularly widespread in presidential campaigns.

Presidential candidates will have to present a very positive image of themselves but have to make sure that the image of themselves is believable. The self presentation should be aimed at facilitating goals and how the actors choose to present themselves depends on the goal in question. Crucial in the study of self presentation is the realisation that self presentations are anything but fixed and static. They change constantly with the audience and the context. The candidate that best reads and

anticipates the demands of his/her audience and situation, will reach the most voters. This demands careful consideration of a constantly changing audience and situation. However, the real challenge is to stay flexible and appeal to as many voters as possible while at the same time remaining consistent. As Schafly (2008) notes, candidates are constantly scrutinised by the media, so every aspect of the candidate's behaviour can be interpreted as projecting some significant facet of their identity. Thus candidates must present their identity through conscious depictions of themselves. This is often done by way of narratives. The stories told about themselves index their identities in a particular way. The candidate chooses different narratives highlighting different aspects depending on the audience. The narrator positions himself within a social context exercising certain beliefs and actions and in comparison with other characters. Schafly argues that the narrative thus tells the story of the candidate, but also the story of the social environment he/she operates within, in this instance the American society.

The narratives can take numerous forms like speeches, interviews, debates, statements and issue standpoints posted on websites and written on flyers handed out to potential voters. Self presentation strategies will differ in these different formats as the audience and context varies. A speech given at a Republican rally in Texas will differ from an interview with a CBS journalist and certainly from a debate with the opposing candidate. However, these presentations are all narratives that are used to present the candidate in a certain way. Cuno (2005) argues that leaders increasingly lead through their words, by acts of speech, by narratives. They are called upon to convey their message and vision through narratives and this forms an especially large part of presidential campaigns. The purpose of the narrative is to communicate the style and substance of their leadership to the people. Gardner (2005) claims that leaders achieve their effectiveness through the stories they relate which are stories of identities that help individuals think and feel who they are. Thus narratives signal belonging to certain social identities and provide clues to the people around you. In a presidential election the candidates draw on these social identity clues in their narratives to establish connections with the voters.

2.3 Voter decision making processes; rational and emotional appeals.

Knowledge about voter decision making processes provide the candidates and their campaign consultants with crucial information about the audience they are trying to reach and thus this type of information can guide candidate self presentation. Often traditional models that attempt to explain voter's decision making process are based on cognitive psychology only which assumes that a strictly rational process takes place. As an alternative, Lau and Redlawsk (2006) propose an information processing-oriented model where decisions are best understood as semi automatic responses to frequently encountered situations. Thus the model they present sits comfortably within social cognition. Lau and Redlawsk highlight that the voters seek to make decisions with as little effort as possible, that they have cognitive limits and that they therefore make use of heuristics in order to make what they feel are good decisions. As everybody uses heuristics, Lau and Redlawsk argue that a model on voter decision making necessary must take this into consideration. Where past models have ignored the social and emotional aspect of decision making, this model takes a step in the right direction by making room for the affective component.

Lau and Redlawsk reject the notion that voters decide rationally and state that relative affective memories and candidate familiarity play a greater role than for instance party identification. As this theory is firmly rooted in cognitive psychology with some social input they do not embroider further on the emotive component thus it really only makes progress in the strict information processing sense without focus on what is apparent to any follower of American presidential elections; how central emotional appeals are. Brader (2006) has observed that appeals to emotions are central in electoral campaigns and not without reason. Based on research from social cognition we can conclude that we have limited cognitive capacity and can only handle limited amounts of information. The question then becomes how we choose what information to focus on. Frijda and Moffat (1994) suggest that emotions function as relevance detectors, They provide feedback on stimuli and have a directive function. Thus when a candidate says something that resonates emotionally with the voter, that voter is far

more likely to pay attention to that particular statement and incorporate it into their overall impression of the candidate. Obviously the trick here is to evoke positive feelings and in as many potential voters as possible. Frijda's theory on emotions as relevance detectors complements Lau and Redlaswk's model of information processing in voter decision making processes by giving clues as to what determines what information is picked up on and provides a much needed focus on emotions which has been lacking. Brader (2006) suggests that emotional and cognitive information is channelled simultaneously in parallel pathways, but that the emotional processing takes so much shorter time to process that it guides the subsequent cognitive processing. It filters the information down to what the cognitive processing capacity can handle.

Emotions are often divided into two main categories; enthusiasm and fear. Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen (2000) have looked into how political communication cues affective intelligence and how imagery cues emotions. Emotional appeals rely on a store of learned associations that determine the significance of certain stimuli and their contexts. These are usually shared across some community or category of persons. They can also be symbolic representations; in the American context they are for instance the Stars and Stripes, the American Constitution or the Pledge of Allegiance. In narratives such as speeches specific words or phrases can hold great symbolic meaning and affective associations. If the candidate manages to invoke enthusiasm around his/her campaign it is far more likely that the potential voter will get involved and ultimately vote. Obama seems to have had such an appeal as he managed to register a great number of new voters. When a candidate campaigns, he/she campaigns for both the hearts and minds of the voters and this is perhaps especially potent in the American context. The emotional appeal is apparent in any speech and interview and campaign consultants see emotional appeals as vital to their strategy. Brader (2006) calls for an integration of the emotional appeals seen in practice into theory and research on political communication and behaviour.

Weston (2004) argues that Republican campaigns tend to recognise that reason is a

slave to emotions, whereas Democrats build their campaigns around the notion of the rational voter. Weston states that the most effective speeches are the ones that combine emotion and cognition. The candidates' success then depends on their ability to tell an emotionally compelling and coherent story about their candidacy. Just as important as the story the candidate tells about him/herself is the story they tell about America. Clinton won in 1992 with a story that empowered the American citizen and with himself cast as the man from Hope (his home town in Arkansas), Roosevelt's story in 1932 was filled with leaps of faith, confidence and a shared mission for all Americans. The winning candidate is the one that has been able to construct a narrative that inspires the American citizen and invokes national pride. In reaching people on the fence, the most efficient appeal is the emotional one. The candidates need to make the people feel that they will be looking out for their interests and the values they consider important. At no time is this more important than in difficult times. As Americans are losing their jobs and homes, the candidates must find a way to build optimism and convince people that as president he/she will make a difference. People want to hear about issues, but set in within a larger story about American as a nation.

2.4 Social Identity Theory:

When Americans decide who to vote for, the natural choice would be the candidate whose ideals and platform are the closest to their own. In other words, the candidate they most identify with. Useful then in shedding light on identity and identification with the candidate is social identity theory. Social identity theory is commonly viewed as analysis of intergroup relations between large scale social categories, resting on the cognitive and self conceptual definition of the social group and group membership (Abrams and Hogg 2004). Tajfel (1978) first explored the perceptual accentuation of categorisation, the cognitive aspects of prejudice and the social comparison processes and intergroup relations. A central thesis is the individual's knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social groups and that this group membership holds some emotional and value significance. A social group is defined as a collection of two or more people who have the same social identity.

Social groups develop a prototype for what the ideal member of that group is. The purpose of the prototype is to capture the similarities within that group and the differences to other groups. It also results in great effort by the group members to assimilate to this prototype, thus holding the group together and avoiding schisms. If group members deviate from this prototype, they are not trusted by other group members as they are considered to be closer to the out group and then also a threat to the in-group's integrity. John McCain was considered by many Republicans to be a deviant member as he voted against his party on a number of occasions and chose to present himself as a more independent and centralist politician. To gain the trust of the party again so that he could be chosen as the Republican candidate, he had to move closer to the prototype of the Republican party, by for instance being more supportive of President Bush. At the same time, being delinquent can be a way of gaining a position among other groups. McCain was seen as having great appeal among so-called independent voters. The challenge was therefore to maintain this appeal while still adhering to the Republican stereotype. Two main motivations for the need for group identification as proposed by social identity theory are self enhancement and uncertainty reduction. By seeking to distinguishing your group from other groups in a positive manner, the group and thus also the individuals that belong to that group experience self enhancement. In terms of uncertainty reduction, people want to know who they are, how to behave and know how others can be expected to behave. The social identity ascertains such classifications.

Roccas and Brewer (2002) are among the social identity theorists to point to the fact that most people belong to multiple social groups at the same time. They argue that membership to small groups is largely dependant on personal ties, whereas membership to larger groups depend more on symbolic attachment. Here collective depersonalised identities are invoked. This is clearly the case with national identities, which I will return to later. Different social groups you belong to can overlap greatly or not at all and individuals vary in social identity complexity- in how well they are able to integrate different social identities. If high in integration the individual is able

to merge many social identities into one with little tension. The distinctions between the in-group and out-groups become blurred and an individual with high social identity complexity can tend to be more tolerant towards out group members. Roccas and Brewer argue that living in multicultural societies can mean more complex social identities. A successful candidate must be able to at least project the image of a person who is able to merge many social identities so they many groups in society feel he can represent them.

So we all have multiple social identities. But when do the different social categorisations become relevant? Rijswijk, Haslam and Ellemers (2006) note that social categorisation is situation dependent and that it hinges on the relative salience in the given social context. Here they draw on social categorisation theory (SCT). It is the situation that determines which differences between groups seem important and thus which categorisation prevails. So who we think we are is affected not only by the situation but how that situation makes us aware of the self relevance of the group. When candidates address voters they do so by way of social groups. They hone their political message so that the members of a particular social group can identify with that message. Dickson and Scheve (2006) argue that political speeches prime the salience for particular identities and if done well can be very effective. A good candidate can contribute to determining which social categorisations are considered important by his/her audience. Political communication in an election campaign comes down to activating (or failing to activate) social identities.

2.5 National identity:

In a presidential election, a social identity we can expect the candidates to invoke is the national identity of that country. After all, it is the nation that elects the president and so a substantial part of the people of that nation must identify with you if you are to be elected president. Presumably the social identity that most people share is the national identity, therefore it makes pragmatic sense to make the national identity the most salient identity. It is difficult to pin down exactly what national identity is. Smith (1991) defines national identity as:

“... ‘national’ identity involves some sort of political community, however tenuous. A political community in turn implies at least some common institutions and a single code of rights and duties for all the members of the community. It also suggests a definite social space, a fairly well demarcated and bounded territory, with which the members identify and to which they feel they belong.”

This is first and foremost a politicised definition of national identity, one that although it mentions the social aspects, really focuses on the political unit that is the nation. In the context of this thesis, a politicised definition makes sense as I attempt to look at how national identity is constructed in the political arena, more specifically by the candidates in a presidential election. The social aspect must however not be forgotten and thus using social identity theory together with a political notion of national identity affords a fuller picture than a singular conceptualisation would. De Cillia, Reisigl and Wodak (1999) introduce some basic assumptions about national identity, one of which is that national identities are a specific form of social identity that is discursively produced, reproduced and destructed by means of language. The idea of a national identity becomes reality through reifying figurative discourses launched by politicians, intellectuals and the media and disseminated through various public institutions. Adding to this, national identity can be viewed, as Bourdieu (1994) argues, as a complex of common ideas of related emotional attitudes shared by a specific group of people. All these ideas fit comfortably within the framework of this thesis. In line with social identity theory the construction of national identities are inextricably linked to the construction of difference or distinction. Searching for identity means looking for what you are, but invariably includes establishing what you are not. National identities are thus constructed against that of other nations. The first settlers that came from Europe to America did so to found a new type of society, set against that of their European native countries. Thus for America a very central part of the construction of American national identity has been the conscious and prided distinctions from European societies.

National identities build on shared history and a collective, if selective, memory of historical events. Discourses on national identity make use of group symbols in order

to create national consciousness. Hall (1996) emphasises the role of culture in the construction of national identities and describes national identity as not only a political construct, but also a system of cultural representations where the citizens of that nation participate in forming the idea of the nation. National narratives are produced and reproduced by actors in concrete contexts such as in a presidential election campaign. He argues that the creators of national identities aim at linking membership within the political nation state and identification with national culture so that culture and state become identical. Drawing on this argument we can expect politicians, through narratives and discourses, to construct notions of national identity in order to build unity and also to shape what the dominant ideas of national identity should be at any given time. This begs the question; which discourses are preferred at which times? Martin (1995) claims that an identity narrative channels emotions so that they can fuel efforts to modify a balance of power and can change perceptions of the past and the future. Thus politicians construct the national identity narrative that they perceive best serves their purpose at a particular time. It would make sense that the overall purpose is to build national unity and pride and to inspire loyalty and support. Part of a campaign strategy would be to identify which aspects of the national identity are most fruitful and will have the most resonance with the audience at any given time and then shape the self presentation of the candidate accordingly.

Although national identities are certainly socially and politically constructed, that does not mean that they are completely fluid and dynamic. No politician can introduce a whole new national identity that is not grounded in central beliefs people have about their country. It has to tap into the shared history, the cultural symbols and narratives of that nation. However, the politician can choose to emphasise certain aspects and downplay others. Also they may wish to create linkages between aspects that before have been held apart. I now turn to look specifically at the American context.

2.6 American identity:

What is the American national identity? The answer to this question can be diverse

and depends largely on who you ask. In a presidential election, different candidates would speak of national identity in different ways. Still, it should be possible to decipher some central tenets. As mentioned in the section on social identity, social identification for large groups would be dependent upon symbolic attachment. This would certainly be the case for the national identity. It should therefore be possible to identify symbols and words that are specific to the American national identity. We have already established that campaigns are saturated with emotional appeals. In the context of the American presidential elections we should expect the candidate to invoke symbols and words that speak of the national identity which in turn would cue this all-important emotional response from the voters.

Wingo (2007) asserts that candidates prefer to make appeals to patriotism because of the practical power of this type of appeals. American patriotism became particularly salient after the Civil War when Lincoln saw the necessity of creating a broader sense of American identity to overcome the divisions that had culminated in the demand from the Confederacy for secession. In 1865 when the secessionists had been defeated it became clear that for the United States of America to survive and thrive, a patriotism that included all the states had to be emphasised. Many theorists have tried to get at the essence of this patriotism which is so widely expressed in American everyday life yet so elusive as it parts with concepts of patriotism from Europe. In Europe, patriotism has been closely linked to territory, but in the American context this is not really the case. The American identity is based on political ideas and institutions as had been observed by Huntington (2004). The founding fathers of America did of course leave Europe to set up a radically different system in America so the fact that American patriotism does not conform to European expectations is perhaps not so strange.

The quest for the American national identity must necessarily start with the American Creed. Hughes (2004) states that the American Creed is best captured by the following statement from the Declaration of Independence:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”.

Together with the Constitution and the Pledge of Allegiance, the Declaration of Independence constitutes the foundation of the American national identity. The Creed is of course a set of political principles, but Huntington (2004) argues that it is vital to understand the culture, namely Protestant, behind the Creed in order to understand American identity. Huntington emphasises that the Americans that gained independence from the British were a small and homogeneous group of people; white, protestant, ex-Brits, generally sharing the same culture- some elements of which they wanted to escape from and some they perhaps unconsciously brought with them. It was this group of people who formed the Declaration of Independence and Constitution- documents that therefore necessarily are saturated with their values and beliefs. Due to their Protestant convictions, the history of America thus facilitates a great role for religion, both in private and public life. Hughes (2004) presents a slightly different view and argues that although the Founding Fathers were Protestant, they were adamant that the United States should be a secular country that ensured the religious freedom that had been the primary objective of the original settlers. Hughes rather attributes the central role of Christianity in American society to the second great awakening that started in the late 1700's and gained real momentum in the 1820's and 30's. This was launched to persuade the nation of what the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution refused to enforce, namely Protestantism. Hughes argues that the Declaration of Independence is actually grounded in deism and that the secular nature of the United States was further concretised in the first amendment of the Constitution.

Deism has its roots in the Enlightenment period and focuses not on any particular religion but rather on the deity - on God. The Creator described in the Declaration of Independence is not the God of any particular religion, but reflects the perceived truth at the time that although there were different religions, all people had in common the

belief in a God- this was nature's law. America, through the Declaration of Independence was seen to represent the natural order of the world and Hughes has coined this aspect of the American narrative the myth of "Nature's nation". Criticism of American policies has as a consequence been made difficult because it would mean disputing what is natural and self-evident. For Hughes, myths are conceptualised as national stories or narratives that serve the nation in important ways by conveying commonly shared convictions. The myths explain why we love our country and why we have faith in our nation's purposes. Thus myths are important for a nation's existence and if the myths are discarded by a large part of population, the nation may disintegrate. Hughes argues that although myths serve an important purpose in holding the nation together, the myths America lives by have tended to become absolutised and subsequently have worked to undermine the American Creed.

Many scholars have been concerned that America has become more fragmented through mass immigration combined with the struggle for individual and perhaps especially group rights that dominated the 1960's such as the Civil Rights Movement, the Women's movement and Gay Rights movement. They ask if this diversity and the strong social identities of sub-groups in the American society has led to a fragmented and dysfunctional national identity. Proponents of diversity argue that a decline in American traditions would lead to a more democratic, less hegemonic society, whereas critics maintain that it is the American traditions that are key in supporting a democratic society. This discussion also corresponds to Hughes (2004) and his depiction of the cynical versus the absolutist stances regarding national myths where the cynical voices question the relevance and importance of the Creed whereas the absolutist view will not accept any criticism of the Creed at all. Which view Americans identify with has massive ramifications for the American nation.

Beasley (2004) has looked at how US presidents use language to develop and maintain feelings of shared national identity within diverse democracies. Presidential rhetoric is used to ensure that national unity is strong enough to sustain diversity. Through addresses to the nation, presidents construct the American identity by

inviting the people to assume certain roles. Thus in a highly diverse society as America, presidents face great constraints when addressing the nation in order to contain the diversity and present the image of a peaceful collected citizenry even in times of turmoil. These constraints are certainly of a material and political nature, but also cultural, symbolic and rhetorical. Political rhetoric is therefore dependent upon discourses at play in the American society. Beasley found that unity is often sought by asking the people to believe in American ideals. This was certainly the aim of Ronald Reagan's "Morning in America" campaign in 1980 which won him the presidency. He sought to capitalise on what many conservatives saw as a moral decline in the American society in the 1960's and 70's. Troy (2005) argues that he created a new brand of Republican rhetoric that was meant to counter the tendency of moving away from national identity towards more group and individual rights. The aim was to restore America's moral integrity and patriotism. The new form of conservatism may have been more optimistic and popular than previous versions, but it still resulted in what Troy describes as an unusual degree of polarisation among the electorate. Many of the groups that had fought for rights in the 1960's did not feel welcome in Reagan's vision of America. Reagan's rhetoric also resulted in deep divides between the Republican Party and the Democratic Party. Such a political fragmentation developed both as a reflection of the social fragmentation and worked to enhance it by creating sharp dividing lines between Democrats and Republicans. In the face of all this fragmentation both in social and political arenas; what binds America together?

Americans have always had a need to understand themselves and so many have attempted to establish what signifies the American spirit that characterises all Americans. Key characteristics that have been identified are mobility and opportunity- both economic and political. Often lists of American characteristics are lists of values and beliefs like ambition, pragmatism and self reliance, belief and faith in democracy, equality and individual freedom- all based on the American Creed. Renshon (2000) observes that it might be useful to look at clusters of national ideas- integrated cultural packages that can both remain stable and change. The national

cultural cluster is then made up of a specific set of a country's core cultural value ideals. In the American context, Renshon traces this back to the underlying motivation of the founding fathers; opportunity and freedom. He identifies three core elements of the American cluster:

- Freedom for self ambition
- Achievement/excellence, social and political equality
- Independence/self reliance, dependency

The cluster tells us what a society values and those values are embedded in institutions and practices. We can therefore expect to see explicit references to them in a presidential election. These tenets of the American identity reflect the Creed and make up the American prototype that Americans are socialised into striving towards. Which tenets will be emphasised will however vary with the context. In an election, different values must be emphasised with different groups; America after all is populated by people who possess different understandings of what American values are.

Colombo, Cullen and Lisle (1996) argue that the key to understanding America is the emphasis on success- people are able to and expected to move up the ladder. This forms part of the capitalist myth as described by Hughes (2004). The capitalist society gives all individuals the opportunity to succeed and Americans should take advantage of every opportunity- this is part of a cultural ideal and to many Americans a fact of life. This myth is seen reflected in the works of Horatio Alger who wrote a number of stories in the 1800's about people who with hard work and a positive attitude worked their way to great success. These stories therefore embody the American Dream. There are divided views of whether such a simplistic outlook reflects reality- but there is no doubt that the myth of the capitalist society is much used in political rhetoric. Colombo, Cullen and Lisle (1996) call this American narrative the myth of individual opportunity and point to Crèvecoeur's notion of America as a classless nation where anyone can become successful. The myth has been further exemplified by for instance Benjamin Franklin who as a self made and self educated man has come to represent the American Dream and the limitless

opportunities of individuals in America. Hughes argues that the capitalist myth draw legitimacy from the other foundational myths like America as the Chosen nation, Nature's nation and the Millennial nation and in turn the success America has seen through its capitalist society serves as confirmation of those myths.

Part of defining what America is, is defining what it is not. This is often done by comparison to other nations. Americans then define themselves partly by assessing their position in relation to the rest of world- perhaps more so than most other nations. Hughes (2004) argues that the Founding Fathers saw America as the Chosen nation, a nation that was meant for special blessings and privileges in the world through their quest for freedom. Inevitably they compared America to all other nations of the world that were not chosen and could therefore not expect the same blessings. After independence, America considered the political institutions they had built to be superior to those of Europe which was the main referent for comparison. For the duration of the 19th century, America chose to have limited relations with the rest of the world. This changed in the 20th century especially after World War II when there was a shift in the American attitude. A new aspect of the American national identity developed, a notion of duty to export their superior institutions to the rest of the world. American values became universal values. Hughes places this new attitude in the context of yet another national myth, namely the myth of the Millennial nation. He describes the Millennial myth as the belief that by making sure the world implemented the American system of government, including unlimited freedom, all the people on earth would be blessed with a millennium of peace, much like the Bible describes the time when Messiah returns to earth. Initially the Puritans believed that this period of peace was something that only Jesus' return would bring, however with the Enlightenment period and the realisation that people can achieve great progress on their own, this view changed and the new position was that Americans should themselves strive for this period of peace.

Neuhaus (2007) claims that the American identity defies the assumption that we must choose between the particular and the universal, that America understands itself as a

particular in the service of the universal. This remains a strong component of the American national identity today, of America as a protector of good and as a referent of morality in the world. This again is linked to myth of America as the Chosen nation. A great part of the American national identity is therefore the role they have assumed in the world system, the self-professed leader of the free world with an obligation and right to spread freedom and the American system of government, democracy. This attitude has been especially apparent after the end of the Cold War. Hughes argues that the myths of America as the Chosen nation, Nature's nation and the Millennial nation together with the Capitalist myth all work together to explain the American national identity and how America sees its role in the world, today as much as when the myths were initially shaped. World events such as the victory over Nazism/Fascism in World War II and over Communism when the Soviet Union collapsed have been taken as confirmation that these myths represent the truth.

2.7 Summary

The literature covered above shows some of the complexity involved in looking at candidate self presentation. It further gives some clues as to what I expect to find in my analysis or at least the areas I expect it will be important to draw on in order to understand the strategies of self presentation chosen by the candidates. Attention must be given to how strategies of self presentation function and how voters decide on who to vote for. Further it is necessary look into just who those voters are; the culture they operate within and which social identities they subscribe to. Other areas could probably have been highlighted here, but this is the literature I have decided to focus on. Next I will turn to describing how I intend to carry out this project with regards to choice of method including materials and type of analysis.

3. Method

3.1 Design:

3.1.1 Qualitative

This thesis belongs within the qualitative paradigm, with the use of textual analysis drawing on narrative and discourse theory. Qualitative research lends itself well to research that is dependent upon tapping into contextual issues in order to shed light on different phenomenon. This is certainly the case here. Qualitative research is particularly effective in obtaining culturally specific information about values, opinions, behaviour and social contexts of particular populations. Qualitative research is also efficient in identifying intangible factors like social norms, ethnicity and religion (FHI 2009). The aim may not first and foremost be to elicit data that can be generalised to other geographical locations but rather to gain a rich and complex understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon. Qualitative research tends to be exploratory in nature without fixed notions of what to be expected to find.

3.1.2 Inductive approach

I decided to take an exploratory or inductive approach to the textual analysis. I wanted to see what the texts could tell me and then let that guide my reading of literature. I had done some general readings of past American presidential campaigns and voter decision making processes but not formed any clear hypotheses about what I expected to find in my analysis. In deductive research you tend to start off with general theory and moving to the more specific. Inductive research on the other hand moves from specific observations to broader theory and cautious generalisations (Trochim 2006). In the beginning, I focused primarily on the texts. The next phase was a more integrative one, where I looked at both text and literature to complement each other and in the final stages I focused on linking suitable literature to the areas highlighted by the analysis. The analysis showed the need to look at different theoretical areas in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the processes that take place when a presidential candidate addresses the American people in the hope

of winning their vote.

3.1.3 Textual analysis

Analyses of texts can take many forms and draw on different theories, but tends to draw on social constructionism seeing texts as social constructs. In this instance the texts in question are written transcripts of oral presentations and conversations, namely speeches and interviews. Textual analysis both analyses the context of the text (who is the writer, what is his/her position and who is the intended audience) and the textual features themselves like which issue is being addressed and how is addressed. In addition textual analysis will tend to place that particular text in a wider category of texts and see how it compares. Some forms of textual analysis will then place that text or the selection of texts in a wider socio-cultural and political setting. Every methodology is partial and produces particular and quite limited kinds of information. Although there are many different theories useful in directing analysis of texts, I have in this thesis been reluctant to choose one direction. Rather I have chosen to draw on multiple approaches that highlight different qualities and problems. The method thus is a more general textual analysis drawing on specific ideas from mainly narrative and discourse theory, as well as rhetorical analysis.

3.1.4 Narrative theory

Narrative theory has grown extensively in recent years and has found its way into most disciplines, including psychology and social science. Narrative theory is traditionally much employed in the world of literature with focus on plots and characters. This type of focus may have limited utility in this specific context. Others though like Whitebrook (2001), have highlighted how we construct identities through narratives which of course is highly relevant in the setting of this thesis. Narrative theory was developed by Fisher (1987) and the basic tenet is that people are essentially storytellers. His theory represented a departure from traditional views of rationality as he argued that people make decisions based on good reasons and what is considered good reasons is determined by contextual factors like history, culture and society. Cornog (2004) draws on narrative theory when he argues that presidential candidates have to tell persuasive stories about the nation, about

themselves and about the problems they face in order to convince the voters to elect them. Success depends on his/her ability to build consensus for the narrative presented and to make sure the press and the public accept their storyline. The story the presidential candidate tells places him/her in a larger setting, highlighting their social identities. The context provides rules for which narratives are accepted which change over time. The candidate with the best understanding of these rules, will have the best possibility to create the most persuasive narrative. Scholars such as Cornog (2004) and Weston (2007) argue that for presidential candidates the best way to present yourself is through a powerful narrative that allows you to set the dominant discourse.

3.1.5. Discourse theory

Discourse theory is not a well defined set of ideas, but rather holds very different meaning to different disciplines. In linguistics, you might look at how language is used in specific contexts to create meaning and how language is politicised to achieve particular aims. Social science on the other hand tend to use the term to describe what is «sayable» or «thinkable» about any given topic in different political, social, historical, cultural contexts. In the context of this thesis I do look at the use of language by the candidate to create meanings that resonate with their audience particularly by use of cultural and national symbols. I am also however sensitive to the fact that cultural and national contexts create powerful rules and discourses for what the candidates are allowed to express in the presidential elections campaigns and how. Discourse is always structured; rules of exclusion and employment dictate what arguments can be proffered, under what conditions and by whom (Kreb and Jackson 2007). Discourse is also concerned with the power some people possess to determine the dominant discourses, namely what to talk about and how (McGregor 2003) This power is in the reach of politicians. In fact, you could argue that the success of a candidate depends on whether he/she is able to set the dominant discourses. If the discourse is strong enough, it is hard for other participants in the discussion to take part without playing by those rules set by the dominant discourse. They are then forced to play on the home turf of whoever set the discourse which

makes it hard to change the nature of the debate as described by Hovden and Lindseth (2004). By choosing not to subscribe to the discourse, you may find yourself excluded and ignored, deemed irrelevant.

Discourse has found its way into political studies focusing on issues like evasion in political talk, political broadcasts and interviews and political language in general. This type of discourse theory has been coined critical discourse analysis and draws heavily on the work of Foucault and Bourdieu (Patrick 2008). Discourses are described as statements about things that come to be considered as truths. Not only is discourse seen as context specific, but also audience specific- this ties in well with theories of self presentation as a function of the speaker, the audience and the context. For this thesis, the most interesting aspect of discourse is its context, the processes (cultural setting) that make its construction possible and the participants (candidates) that turn it into real life action by attempting to achieve the ultimate social objective- winning the election.

3.1.6 Rhetorical analysis

Another way of looking at texts, is to do a rhetorical analysis where you break down the whole of the text into the sum of its parts, trying to determine what the writer wants to achieve and which strategies are being used to reach those goals (UBS 2007). One such mode of presentation can be through a narrative and the writer can make use of powerful discourses to get their message across. A rhetorical analysis would also look at the coherence and clarity of the text. Needless to say, an immense amount of studies have focused on the rhetoric of candidates running for office. Campaign strategists and speech writers make good use of rhetorical theory when planning how the candidate is to present him/herself in a speech or an interview. The candidate must come across as reliable, credible, fair and with a certain authority on the issues on which he/she speaks. The self presentation is honed according to the current objective, whether it is to introduce their candidacy, confront an attack from the opposition or present their platform on a particular issue. Further the rhetorical analysis will consider the context in which the presentation will take place.

3.2 Choice of materials

There are numerous ways in which presidential candidates present themselves during the election campaign. The most central however, are the speeches they give in front of various audiences and the interviews conducted on the television news which is what I have decided to focus on.

Different modes of self presentation take different forms. Speeches are essentially monologues, where the speaker will be able to pick up on how well the audience is responding to what he is saying, but in general the speech has been written in advance and thus is rarely changed as the speaker proceeds. A lot of work goes into crafting a good speech, after all its purpose is to persuade the audience to accept your story. Of course, the candidate does not primarily write the speeches himself, but has good help from consultants and speech writers. It should however represent the vision the candidate has for his role and also for America as a nation. A good speech is always directed at its audience. Normally the audience will be a varied one comprising of both friendly and hostile audience members. The speaker must find a way of connecting him/herself to the audience- or to as large a portion of the audience as possible. The purpose of any speech is to evoke emotional reactions to the words in the audience and LaFauci (2009) argues that how good a speech is depends on how good a story it tells.

An interview on the other hand is a conversation and thus its development is not only determined by the candidate. Not everything can be prepared in advance, although you can be sure the candidate has been drilled on their positions on different issues that are sure to come up. By participating in the interview, the candidate has agreed to take part in a conversation that is actually controlled by the interviewer, Ekström (2001) argues. The interviewer starts and finishes the interview, introduces topics, invites responses from the interviewee and decides when to move on to new questions. It is inherent in the interview structure that the interviewee is expected to cooperate by answering the questions posed. Thus the power relations is very

different from the speech. The interviewer has great power over the ways in which the interviewee is allowed to present him/herself and thus we can expect to find great differences in candidate presentation from interview to interview. Cohen (1989) has looked at news interviews in Great Britain, South Africa and the United States and found that American news programmes carried the most interviews, broadcast the fewest questions from the actual interview on air and asked the most challenging questions. Thus participating in interviews can be potentially be very positive and potentially very dangerous for candidates running for office.

Online resources on campaign material have exploded with official candidate websites with speech transcripts and statements, videos of interviews posted on YouTube by private people and extensive coverage by the American mass media. Thanks to this, I have had access to the same material as I would have had if I had been living in the US. The problem was never getting enough material. Great demands are placed on candidates to present themselves in various settings, both political, social and geographical, for the duration of the campaign. The candidates give innumerable speeches and take part in a vast amount of interviews. The challenge lay therefore in choosing which speeches and interviews I would be focusing on. The interviews chosen were the ones aired on channels with the largest audiences- namely CBS, CNN and Fox. As the financial crisis dominated the campaign and thus also the speeches given, the the speeches chosen here were quite simply the ones that dealt in most detail with issues of foreign policy and national security. In addition, towards the end of the campaign the speeches tended to be very similar. I have therefore chosen speeches that were as diverse in content as possible.

As mentioned already, the analysis was inductive, meaning I had not formed any hypotheses of what I expected to find. However, I had a set of topics I wanted to explore such as American national identity, references to religion, self presentation and strategies used to reach out to voters such as emotional appeals. The choice of these topics was partially determined by my background in psychology, what I had observed in the 2004 elections and by the general literature on American presidential

elections I had read.

4. Analysis

This section includes the analyses of the eight texts chosen for this thesis, two speeches and two interviews from each candidate.

4.1 John McCain speech at the Annual American Legion National Convention, Phoenix, Arizona 26/08-2008

John McCain here speaks at the American Legion's national convention, an organisation set up in 1919 by veterans returning from WWI. The Legion today has 3 million members and anyone who is discharged or current personnel of the US Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard or Air Force is eligible for membership (www.legion.org).

Self presentation

In this speech McCain presents himself overall as a protector of American values and therefore as a man of honour. He will fight for America and states his vision of what America stands for; freedom, justice, leadership in the world: "To promote stability and peace, America must stand firmly on the side of freedom and justice. The next president must bring to office a clear-eyed view of our nation's role in the world, as the defender of the oppressed and a force for peace". He will be able to fight for these values because of his background in the armed forces which has given him the knowledge, courage and American pride necessary to govern, implicitly stating that Obama cannot possess these qualities as he does not have a military background: "No one who has worn the uniform of his or her country can ever take these matters lightly. We all learned an ethic in the service of looking after one another, of leaving no one behind, and this commitment did not end when we left the service». McCain uses American history to illustrate this point and uses the context of the work of the Legion to trace the military triumphs of America from WWI up until today. The history of America is directly linked to the people in the audience and is used as a source of national pride.

Another important part of McCain's self presentation is that of himself as “one of them”. The people in the audience are his friends which is particularly emphasised when McCain prizes the friendship and camaraderie he gained from serving in the armed forces. He knows their concerns and he will serve as president according to the values they share through their background. He portrays the audience as faithful, with great values and courageous and as he implies that he is one of them, these are characteristics he indirectly grants himself as well.

Self presentations hinge on whether they are deemed believable and McCain attempts to make his self presentation believable through his background and experience which is similar to many in the audience. There is always a fine line between enhancing yourself to the extent that it is no longer believable and not enhancing yourself enough to present yourself as a strong and capable leader. McCain uses his military credentials as well as his constant focus on his belief in a great America to build such an image. McCain emphasises personality traits and patriotism that he perceives himself to share with the audience to achieve an emotional connection. The narrative he tells about who he is sends explicit and implicit messages about what kind of president he would be. If they recognise themselves in his presentation, he has succeeded in his quest for believability.

The military has a high standing in America and most candidates running for office highlight any military experience they may have. A vital part of McCain's personal narrative is his time serving in the US military. Especially his experience as a POW in Vietnam and how it formed of his love and gratitude towards America. He is almost suggesting that you cannot experience the same love for your country without having such a past and he telling the audience that he is an American in a way that his opponent cannot be. A crucial part of self presentation when running for office is to highlight your opponent's questionable character traits with the purpose of elevating yourself. McCain uses Obama's opposition to the war in Iraq to portray him as unpatriotic and untrue to America as leader of the free world: « And if he really thinks

that, by liberating Iraq from a dangerous tyrant, America somehow set a bad example that invited Russia to invade a small, peaceful, and democratic nation, then he should state it outright». Obama is unpatriotic when he is critical of a US military operation and this stance is in line with the Bush discourse that criticism of the mission in Iraq means criticism of the troops which is an absolute taboo. Obama's stance is by McCain explained by his inexperience, an inexperience underlined by his according to McCain misguided perception of the end of the Cold War: «The Cold War ended not because the world stood "as one," but because the great democracies came together, bound together by sustained and decisive American leadership».

Social identities

This is an audience where McCain should feel fairly at home seeing as he is a member of the Legion. In addition, it is an audience that traditionally is seen to vote Republican. There are therefore clear social identities he can appeal to in this audience. McCain shares the background of many in the audience so this should not be too hard. He simply draws on his time serving the US Army and emphasises the friendships it gave him: «All of us returned from war with a few experiences we'd gladly forget, but the friendships and camaraderie we brought home are forever». He is careful to pay full tribute to the troops that have served in the armed forces and who still do: «I have had the good fortune to know personally a great many brave and selfless patriots who sacrificed and shed blood to defend America. But I have known none braver or better than those who do so today. They are our inspiration, as I suspect all of you were once theirs».

In this setting it would make sense for McCain to state what he would do for veterans if he is elected and the majority of the speech is concerned with policies he would introduce. A president is really a service provider (Newman 1994) and for this audience to vote for him it is vital that he connects his policies directly to them. The use of the word pledge, so familiar to Americans through the Pledge of Allegiance, is meant to give extra credibility to his promise: «And I pledge to you that as president I will lead». The specific policy changes referred to in this speech revolves around reforms to the Veterans Affairs (VA) system which makes sense as the audience is obviously interested in knowing what they can expect to get out of voting for McCain. McCain is connecting with his audience by focusing explicitly on what he perceives to be

their specific concerns, assuring them of his commitment. Although nearly half the speech deals with issues of America's role in the world, there is no specific mention of the operations people could expect for American troops out in the world if McCain is elected. McCain remains vague and refers to history and American greatness generally. This lack of focus leaves the listener assuming that he will then follow in the path of President Bush- after all he provides no counter discourse.

National identity

Many scholars have pointed to the fragmentation of the American national identity and the tendency among certain groups in the population to see national identity as an evil that legitimates America to make policy decisions that go against human rights (Miller 2007). McCain here clearly presents a counter discourse to this view. To any president, national unity is necessary. The president depends on as large a part of the population as possible to rally around his policy choices. For McCain then it is vital to tap into national pride in order to fight this fragmentation and link his policy platform explicitly to national identity. Throughout the speech McCain expresses great pride at what America has been both in itself and in relation to the world and champions the view that things should remain exactly as they are because that is America's true role in the world. A vital part of a country's national identity is who they are in relation to the rest of the world, perhaps more so for America than most other nations. Criticism towards US policies has mounted in the world and domestically in the US during the latter part of the Bush presidency. McCain confronts critics of America who have questioned US policy choices. He argues that America is still the uncontested leader in the world and that this becomes evident in times of crisis: «There are those who say that our day as the free world's leader has passed, that our moment is waning. They point to the anti- Americanism that is sometimes heard in Europe and elsewhere, and take this as a sign that America no longer has the strength or the moral credibility to lead. The criticisms tend to pass or quiet down when global threats and dangers appear. In times of trouble, free nations of the world still look to America for leadership, because they know the strength of America remains the greatest force for good on this earth».

This is intended for Americans to continue to have great faith in their nation. Americans have felt the increasingly negative sentiments expressed around the world, but McCain reminds them that America is the «greatest force of good on this earth» McCain uses this sentiment to justify the decision to go into Iraq and persists that America's actions in the world not only protect America- but also the rest of the world. It is a central component of the American national identity that America stands for what is good in the world, like democracy, freedom, equality. McCain uses the word "cause" to attempt to invoke these sentiments in his listeners. He talks of how American leaders should be proud of America and its history and accomplishments and that the members of the Legions are to a great extent to thank for the ability to feel such pride. Elements of the myths described by Hughes (2004) can be seen in McCain's narrative of America, especially America as the Chosen nation and the Millennial nation. Central to these myths is the notion of America as a beacon of justice and good in the world and an almost obligation to implement freedom throughout the world. Thus McCain is tapping into powerful national narratives that help Americans make sense of who they are.

Obama's campaign buzzword was change and McCain too jumped on this wagon and used change to brand his campaign. However, from this speech at least it is difficult to decipher what exactly this change consists of. McCain is on Republican home turf here and realises perhaps that it would be unwise to create distances between himself and President Bush. He chooses instead not to make any references to him at all. Rather the focus is on the greatness of America and his intention to keep it that way thus he attempts to invoke in the listener the same emotions that Bush tapped into in 2000 and 2004. In this speech McCain makes numerous appeals to the American national identity by focusing on America as the greatest force for good in the world. This makes sense as the audience here and future members of the Legion have been and are burdened with the responsibility for upholding this leading position in the world for America and this is something McCain pays attention to. His appeals to national identity may be rather explicit, but he makes very few specific statements on issues relating to foreign policy and the American troops. The speech is focused on

building the image of McCain as an honourable man. From the speech, it seems that the military can expect to be involved in not less but more missions abroad as American missions are presented as how the American force of good will be upheld in the world.

This speech seeks to establish McCain as a man of honour and as a true American. McCain presents a clear narrative of who he is through his past and what America is. This story is built around powerful myths of American national identity. He fails, however to provide much of a narrative of who he will be as president of the United States. He remains vague on issues and when he does focus on issues it is narrowly on reforms in the VA system.

4.2 John McCain speech after holding a national security round table meeting 30/10-2008 Tampa, Florida.

This speech by John McCain was given just five days before the election and so must be considered the final push in the campaign.

Self presentation

In this speech, McCain highlights his experience. This partly done by naming individuals with great experience in foreign affairs like Henry Kissinger who is much respected in America, as friends whom he has worked with in the past: “Today I consulted with a number of distinguished citizens who know from experience what matters most in the affairs of our country... they are trusted friends and advisors of long standing including Dr. Henry Kissinger”. This is a conscious part of his self presentation, boosting and elevating himself by association with respected individuals who have in the eyes of most Americans achieved great things. McCain’s assurance that the likes of Kissinger will be among his closest advisors and colleagues if he is elected president is meant to serve as a sort of security guarantee that America will have the very best on board if they vote for McCain.

McCain has been criticised by Obama for his voting record on Iraq which very much follows the Bush administration. Iraq would no doubt without the success of the surge have been a difficult issue for McCain and one where he would have seen it in his interest to remove himself as far from the Bush administration as possible. Although McCain certainly never mentions President Bush in this speech, he does not make any marked effort to criticise him either. Thanks to the proclaimed success of the surge, the Bush administration and it seems most of the American media are convinced that the American presence in Iraq will soon come to an end and McCain reiterates this point: “Senator Obama opposed removing the dictator in Iraq and now obstinately opposes the need to defend the young democracy in that country- even with victory so clearly in sight” Barack Obama does not have much experience in politics compared to John McCain. Not surprisingly, this is something that McCain has focused on in his criticism of Obama. McCain describes Obama as “obstinate”, a word that is often used about stubborn children. Obama is too young to have understand the history of the United States: “He seems unaware that mere talk has been tried many times to no avail, and that our adversaries recognize such gestures as a sign of weakness”, whereas McCain has lived through many historical events and knows them first hand. Obama is depicted as weak and indecisive in the face of serious threats by stating that «America does not have to choose». McCain however is tough and decisive and reminds Americans that here and now they have to choose as the election is only days away. By portraying himself as strong and decisive which are traditionally seen as masculine traits and Obama as indecisive and weak which are often seen as feminine qualities he is exemplifying the discourse in American politics that leaders must possess clear masculine traits.

He goes on to ask: “.. the question is whether this is a man who has what it takes to protect America from Osama bin Laden and other grave threats in the world. And he has given you no reason to answer in the affirmative”. McCain is implying that if you vote for Obama as president you will practically be asking for an attack on America, even his own vice presidential candidate says so: “Senator Joe Biden has a way of straying off message and stumbling on the truth, and his most recent warning bears close attention. He cautioned-

in fact he guaranteed his listeners- that because he is untested Barack Obama would only invite an international crisis”. McCain is here trying to build consensus for his discourse of Obama as inadequate by drawing on his own allies and Joe Biden.

All in all, McCain very much defines himself against that of his opponent in this speech and uses what he perceives as weaknesses in Obama to highlight his own strengths. Obama is inexperienced, whereas he, McCain has a wealth of experience. He suggests that it is not only he who thinks so: “These statesmen and those who have joined me here today are supporting my candidacy because we share many of the same convictions and the same assessment of the national security challenges before our country”. And with good reason, they question whether my opponent in this election has the wisdom or judgement to serve as commander in chief.”

Discourse of fear

Political psychologists have concluded from studies that in order to make people pay attention to what you are saying, invoking fear is a very good strategy. It seems here that McCain is trying to invoke the feeling of fear in his audience with the choice of the word “danger” linked also to his statement above that the financial crisis has made us forget what is really dangerous out in the world: “But when that day arrives, and the worries of financial crisis have fallen away, we will find awaiting our country all of the same challenges and dangers that were there all along... with terrorists still plotting new strikes across the world, millions of innocent lives are still at stake” . McCain wants focus back on the issues he feels most comfortable discussing which is national security and is trying to convince his audience that this is the most important issue. There is little doubt that Americans worry about possible terrorist attacks. However, in a time when many American are losing their jobs and cannot make their mortgage payments, the financial crisis hits closer to home than the thought of terrorists plotting attacks. Terror attacks may or may not happen, but the financial crisis has, making it naturally the most salient issue for most Americans.

In order to bring the focus back on national security, McCain is painting a grim

picture of the world out there and the threats that encircle America. McCain taps into the notion of America as being the guarantor of security world wide and that America should be and is the world leader: “At least when European nations chose the path of higher taxes and cutting defence, they know that their security would still be guaranteed by America”.

Appeals to national identity

An efficient way of invoking the enthusiasm that is needed for people to vote for you, is by invoking strong feelings of national identity. McCain does this throughout the speech. He encourages people not to lose focus and to be assured that it is the work done already in Iraq that will lead to victory. Thus he is again defending his decisions to vote according to the Bush administration strategy on so many occasions as he believes that is the path that is now taking them closer to winning the war. He uses words like courage, freedom, liberty, justice and peace which are all the motivating words used to justify American operations abroad. McCain refers to the audience as «my fellow Americans»- signalling that «I am one of you, we come from the same nation», thus appealing to a powerful social identity. Just the word American holds a certain patriotic pride for many Americans and the American that McCain describes knows what is right and what is wrong and perseveres even in the face of adversity.. McCain expresses on several occasions his pride of his country and of being an American. Different presidents have primed different aspects of the American national identity. Clinton focused on America as the leader of the free world after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Bush forged stronger links between religion and morals as the most important aspects of the national identity and that had to be protected from external threats. The aspect of the American national identity that McCain appeals to is America as a guarantor of not just their own national security, but the security of the rest of the world as well. This would serve as a justification of the US invasion of Iraq as well as Afghanistan.

Finally it is America’s task to continue to spread justice, liberty and freedom-absolute tenets of the American national identity. This narrative of America

corresponds well to what Hughes (2004) calls the Millennial myth meaning America's self professed task of liberating the world. One of the other main primers of national identity is the history that the nation shares and McCain makes direct appeals to this in the last paragraph of the speech: «We have passed through a difficult time and more courage will be needed in the years ahead... We will not yield to intimidation and by our strength we will prevent threats from turning into tragedies. This is America's work in the world as it has always been in our finest moments. We are called still to spread liberty, to assure justice, to be the makers of peace. And this is the great work I will carry on as your president and commander in chief».

This last paragraph of McCain's speech is one of optimism. The speech may have been gloomy at times, but he ends on a high note. America will prevail and he is using history to tell his audience that it is possible. America has faced hardships before and made it through and they will this time too. McCain also appeals to unity- this is something they will do together and as long as they stand together they can face any challenge: "We're going to pull together through these hard times- and do it together just as our country has done before". The message of unity is one that I found to be very distinct in Obama's texts and here it seems that McCain is trying to appeal to the same sentiment. If fear is thought to force people's attention, enthusiasm is what makes people commit and fight for a cause. There is a sense of empowerment here as well in that optimism. Americans have a choice. If they choose to vote for him, he will steer them safely through all the named dangers. The empowerment is also felt in his focus on past victories- we have done this before and thus we can do it again.

4.3 Barack Obama- speech on the National Security Avail- 22/10-2008, Richmond, Virginia

This speech was one of the few in the American presidential campaign with explicit focus on the challenges America faces in relation to the rest of the world.

Link between financial crisis and national security

This speech was held at a time when the financial crisis had assumed prime position in the American presidential election so that even in a speech primarily scheduled to cover national security, Barack Obama chooses to focus on the financial crisis and its links with national security. It would have seemed out of context and out of touch with reality to ignore the financial situation. The focus is always implicitly on the faults of the Bush administration and the kind of leadership that Obama here blames for the financial crisis “ - which have grown more daunting because of the failed policies of the last eight years”. He not only blames Bush for driving the economy into the ground, but attacks the common dichotomy often seen between national security and the economy “To succeed, we need leadership that understands the connection between our economy and our strength in the world”. Obama takes some time to forge links between the two issues thus making the connection explicit: “We must be strong at home to be strong abroad - that is the lesson of our history”. He claims that as a consequence of America’s financial problems, the national security is threatened. President Bush has defended most of his policies by claiming that they were necessary for national security and Obama’s claim that the choices Bush has made has actually led to poorer national security offers quite a different perspective. National security in America has not traditionally been linked explicitly to the economy, but rather to military capability only. Obama linking national security to the economy adds an element to the debate which may benefit the Democrats more than the Republicans in as in previous elections democrats have tended to score better on economic issues .

National identity

History, according to Obama, shows that Americans when they stand together can accomplish anything «To keep our country safe and prosperous, we need leadership that brings the American people together. That is the lesson of our history. Together, we cannot fail; together, we can rise to meet any challenge». This is a notion that resonates deeply with Americans and one that they believe in. Huntington (2004) argues that national identity is crafted through history. Such appeals to history therefore are direct appeals to the American national identity and Obama strategically draws on history to give his vision credibility. The American national identity had greatest salience with Americans during the World Wars of the 20th century (Huntington 2004) and it is no coincidence that Obama brings the example of WWII to the fore: «Through World War II, American workers built an Arsenal of Democracy that helped our heroic troops face down fascism. Through the Cold War, the engine of the American economy helped power our triumph over Communism».

Obama speaks much of uniting the people of America whom he sees as being fragmented along multiple lines including partisanship. A renewed focus on the American national identity- what holds America together, what Americans share- could be an effective way of achieving the unity that he has calls for. In that respect the financial crisis could serve well as a catalyst to inspire the American people to remember the values that founded America, just as 9/11 did a great deal to renew the salience of the American national identity. The message is that as long as we stand united, we can achieve anything including overcoming the present challenges. The notion of competitiveness is one that resonates well with the American people and so it makes pragmatic sense to draw upon this characteristic in the American people .

A notion that is central to the American national identity is that they are the leading nation in the world and Obama refers explicitly to this «Now, we must renew American competitiveness to support our security and global leadership». The use of the word «homeland» is one that invokes strong patriotic feelings for Americans. In order to create national unity, Obama appeals to national symbols and the notion of the

homeland is a powerful one- especially after 9/11. On how America should relate to the rest of the world, Obama states the importance of cooperating with other nations which is a marked change from the unilateralist approach of the Bush administration. He seems to be selling multilateralism to the American people as a way of avoiding that America takes the whole cost: “We must recognize that from global economic turmoil to global terrorism, the challenges we face demand American leadership of strong alliances. When America is isolated, we shoulder these burdens alone, and the security and prosperity of the American people is put at risk. Yet for eight years, we have seen our alliances weakened and our standing in the world set back”.

Many Americans feel indeed that they have to shoulder too much responsibility in the world in particular in NATO operations such as the one in Afghanistan. Huntington (2004) argues that in America enemies are often identified against the Creed which expresses the basis of the American national identity. In this speech Obama does identify enemies to American national unity and thus also to American as a nation. Firstly in accordance with the dominant political discourse on national security he talks about terrorists. Then secondly George W Bush (thus also implicitly McCain) is presented as an enemy to the American national identity and perhaps more salient for Americans- a threat to national security. This position is underlined by the explicit link made between national security and the economy which will be at an all-time low at the time when the Bush presidency ends. Bush (and McCain who according to Obama will carry on his policies) is also made out to be a villain because he is blamed for the fragmentation of the American people which is the only reason why America should fail in addressing severe challenges “He (McCain) would also continue the divisive politics that undercuts the bipartisan cooperation and national unity that is so badly needed in challenging times”. Americans are asked to define themselves against enemies to stand united against international challenges.

Emotional appeals

Recently there has been much criticism of the tendency in political science to look at voters as rational decision makers (Brader 2006). Obama here does appeal to reason; he builds arguments as to what the national security challenges are, how Bush or

McCain strategies have failed/would fail and how he instead would tackle the issues. The explicit descriptions of how he would change the Afghanistan policies are appeals to rationality- it is going badly so we need to change course. However, the speech is also full of emotional appeals first and foremost linked to the American national identity. Words and phrases like homeland, lessons of our history, together we can rise to meet any challenge. These are statements of optimism, a call to draw on strengths Obama sees as being inherent in all Americans. No challenge is too great. He installs a sort of urgency when he says that “we cannot afford four more years of policies that have failed to adjust to our new century”. Implicitly; you cannot afford to not vote for me.

Self presentation:

The mantra for Obama’s campaign was change and both implicitly and explicitly that is the cornerstone of this speech: «It's time for a fundamental change, and that's why I'm running for President”. It is seen first and foremost in Obama's direct criticism of the Bush administration (and John McCain through his voting record). Obama chooses to focus on his voting record and by so doing markets himself as an agent of change. He uses his voting record to brand himself a staunch and consistent critic of the Bush administration. Secondly he markets himself as a believer in America and an optimist. America can conquer any challenge when its people come together. There are emotional appeals with references to the homeland and to victories in American history. He markets himself also as a uniting force, as a president that would cut across lines of partisanship which is necessary to achieve this unity that he so strongly advocates. He is keen to present himself as a candidate for all Americans something which is done to assure people that he will not be an African American president but an American president.

Obama's strongest claim against McCain is his tendency to have voted with Bush, seeing as so many Americans have expressed that they want a change from President Bush. Obama here likens McCain to Bush and thus removes McCain far from himself. Obama almost exclusively uses “we”, “our” and “us” in this speech only

referring to himself specifically when he highlights statements he has made. The choice of “we” is of course a conscious one. This speech forms part of Obama's narrative about who he will be as a president. For people to vote for Obama they have to relate to him, they have to believe that he shares their values and opinions and will make decision when in the White House that they feel represent them. Obama thus uses “we” to show that he is one of them. It is also a call to action and a tool to empower the voters. We can do this if we stand together. It also takes some of the pressure off himself- after all he is saying that I cannot do this without you. In this context, John McCain is “he” so he is excluded from this “we”. “We” are the people who want change, who believe in America and can reach across partisan lines. McCain represents the opposite. This ties in well with social identity theory- “we” form the in group and anyone who is not a part of this “we” forms the out group. Who “we” are will depend on the situation and who is it in the candidate's interest to include. In appeals to the American national identity, “we” would mean all Americans, but when Obama wants to mark the distance between himself and McCain and Bush it is important that they are presented as part of the out group even if they are Americans.

4.4 Barack Obama speech held at the Clinton Global Initiative, New York, 25/09-2008

Social identity

In Obama's speech on national security, the primary focus was on national unity as a way of fighting threats from abroad. There was some focus on cooperation with other nations, but always of the United States as leaders and the most central actor. There were great emotional appeals to the American national identity. In this speech the focus is slightly different. This is due to a change in the audience, which in the last speech included a wide range of Democrats and independents whom Obama had to convince the American people of his vision or make sure he did not alienate those who had in reality already decided they favoured him. Here, the audience is far more specialised and may indeed not entirely comprise of Americans. Thus this speech may

not aim primarily to win the vote of your average American but rather to gain support from an interest group, namely the Clinton Global Initiative and to show support to an initiative Obama endorses. Many scholars, among them Huntington (2004) and Hughes (2004) has noted that a gap has arisen in the US between those for whom the American national identity has the greatest salience and those who favour a more cosmopolitan identity in tune with forces of globalisation. It has been observed that so-called academic and other elites are more likely to embrace the cosmopolitan identity and the way Obama here speaks of shared destinies and security, common security and global issues suggests that he has assessed the audience here to be sensitive to such cosmopolitan concerns. «We live in a time when our destinies are shared. The world is more intertwined than at any time in human history».

The issues themselves, primarily global threats that may seem rather distant to many Americans, account for part of the change in rhetoric. He does not talk of Americans here explicitly but of “we” as the world community, countries that work closely together on these issues that transcend borders and national interests. The threats are not threats to America only, but to all of mankind: «Climate change. Poverty. Extremism. Disease. These problems offend our common humanity. They also threaten our common security». Where in the national security speech in Richmond he used imagery to highlight what he perceived to be specifically American, namely freedom, opportunity and a strong work ethic; here he focuses on universal, global values. In the speech on national security Obama deemed the social identity that encompassed most of his audience and best served his purposes to be the American national identity, thus most references were made to that. This can be said to be the overarching social identity of citizens of a nation, one that includes all with citizenship to that country and frames non-citizens as the out group that the in group wishes to be distinct from. Here the primary social identity is a global, shared humanity. The group members are those who share the same values and ideals, agrees on what the international challenges are and how they should be met. The out group are those that contest such a vision. Nationality does not determine group membership, anyone can be a member as long as they share this view of the world.

Obama considers the support of the Americans people to be crucial in his work, but so is the cooperation of other nations as the challenges at hand requires international cooperation. Therefore it is in his interest to make salient the so-called global identity.

National identity

Obama implicitly refers to American values and ideals in his reference “Walls that divided old enemies have come down. Markets have opened. The spread of information and technology has reduced barriers to opportunity and prosperity, and opened doors to new competition and risk”. The world after the Cold War is very much a world in the American mould with focus on freedom, democracy and equality- at least according to the Americans. It corresponds well to the myths of the Millennial nation as described by Hughes (2004) where the collapse of the Soviet Union served to strengthen the American view that their purpose on earth is to bring freedom to the world. Another important appeal to the American national identity made in this speech is the reference to the American dream: «In America, we have seen that there is no dividing line between the ability of folks to live their dreams on Main Street, and the bottom line of investment banks on Wall Street”, a central truth in the American national narrative and one that offers an empowering vision that invokes great national pride. As long as you work hard you will be rewarded and you can achieve anything. Indeed Obama ends the speech by stating that it is time to get to work: «These are the dreams that we must make our own. We live in a time when our destinies are shared. But our destinies will be written by us, not for us. Now, it falls to us to get to work”. This too has an empowering effect.

The notion of equality is also referred to here: “Prosperity cannot be sustained if it shuts people out. Growth cannot just come from the top down - it must come from the bottom up, with new jobs that pay good wages, and new innovation that creates opportunity across the globe”. Equality may not be the reality in the American society, but it represents the ideal as it is written in the Declaration of Independence. There may be a great divide between the ideal and the reality but Americans see it as crucial to work towards this ideal of what America should be and this is what Obama taps into here. America must move in a direction that brings it closer to ideals of equality, opportunity and prosperity; the notion that if you give people the opportunity to be prosperous and

successful, they will be. He also taps into the general consensus that top down processes are bad. There are no references to the “homeland” and proud American history here. Having considered his audience, Obama makes a speech equally steeped in emotional appeal, but uses different tools to invoke emotion in the listeners. American national values become universal global values and American history becomes global history. There are many references to shared destinies and global humanity. Different triggers are necessary for different audiences and a focus on American supremacy would not be the appropriate or pragmatic strategy here.

Emotional appeals

Obama speaks of choice and will in this speech «This must be the time when we choose not to wait any longer. We must marshal the will». Those specific words are chosen to empower the listener. We can achieve change if we only choose to and muster the will power necessary. It is not our inability for change that hinders us, but the choices we make and the lack of will power. Change is thus possible and Obama sells himself as the person to lead that change. Obama almost indicates that action is inevitable, which would actually go against his mantra of choice and free will earlier on and which is reminiscent of President Bush' justification of invasion in Iraq. Obama also boosts the audience by complementing them on supporting the Clinton Global Initiative «That's why you've come to CGI. Because that's what this moment calls us to do». Another way to create a bond with his audience is to bring up an issue that has caused outrage among Americans; increased gas prices which for many middle class Americans has had an impact on their private economy “it has forced families to pay their wages at the pump”. Thus he speaks a language most people can identify with in a speech that easily could have removed itself from the issues that Americans feel are most important.

When speaking about climate change, Obama deliberately uses the phrase «moral challenge». Stuckey (2004) has argued that all American elections are about moral and value choices and the Republicans have effectively managed to reduce moral and value issues to be about social conservative issues like abortion, gay marriages, attacks on family values and gun control. Obama chooses to build new connotations

with the word moral. Implicitly moral can be equated to something that is right, something that has to be done and is thus an emotionally loaded word. By setting the energy issue as a moral one, Obama is saying that the only right thing is to focus on energy. As Obama in the national security speech in Richmond linked the financial crisis to national security, he here links climate change and energy policy first to the financial crisis and then to national security. This a marked broadening of the definition of national security

Self presentation

From personality focused elections in the 1980's to a shift towards focus on issues with the 1992 Clinton campaign (Newman 1994), candidates now depend upon spinning the issues in a way that speaks loudly about their competency, knowledge and vision. Obama is very explicit in what he intends to do to tackle the problems of climate change and energy policy: «Abroad, the United States must get off the sidelines. We'll reach out to the leaders of the biggest carbon emitting nations and ask them to join a new Global Energy Forum to lay the foundation for the next generation of climate protocols. We'll build an alliance of oil-importing nations, and work together to reduce our demand, and break the grip of OPEC. And as we develop clean energy, we should share technology and innovations with the nations of the world". This is intended to make him look like a strong and competent leader which is crucial in his self presentation as someone who will be a capable president. When a candidate tells the story of what he/she intends to achieve as president, people look for coherence and clarity- they don't want to be guessing what the candidate means and they want to feel sure that the policies will reflect their own values. To this audience, clear intentions about these issues will go down well and signal a change from present policy.

President Bush has received much praise for his work in Africa in particular when it comes to fighting HIV/Aids. This may be the only area where it serves Obama well to refer explicitly to Bush policies that he intends to continue with. A common strategy of good self presentation is to elevate and bring forward the achievements of other people if support for them will make you look better (Schlenker 2003). This is definitely the case here where Obama highlights the work Bush has done in Africa "I

think President Bush - and many of you there today - have shown real leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. This is a fight that I will continue as President". On any other issue, Obama would seek to distance himself as much as possible from President Bush, but on this issue and in front of this audience it is strategically smart to associate yourself with this particular Bush policy.

Obama spends some time making explicit the ways in which the international challenges are challenges for the American people as well: «The child who goes to a radical madrasa outside of Karachi can end up endangering the security of my daughters in Chicago... A deadly flu that begins in Indonesia can find its way to Indiana within days". These are all ways of bringing global issues closer to the American people as they are more likely to condone spending on global issues if the issues are brought closer to them and made relatable. Obama's references to his daughters especially drive this point home and also shows another side to Obama; he is just a father who want to protect his family. Through self presentation, the speaker positions him/herself in a social setting and in this speech (Schlenker 2003). Obama positions himself as a person fighting for the same things that the people present in the audience fight for. He creates a bond between them and himself just as he creates a bond with other salient social identities like that of a parent, or someone has lost his job or for whom the rise in fuel prices has had serious financial consequences. He taps into issues that are important to people and with this shows them that he understands their concerns. Although he spends some time making explicit these concerns and then painting a rather grim picture of the dangers and threats that come from living in such an interdependent world- the overall message is one of optimism. The audience is different here from the speech on national security in Richmond and so is the basic topic. However, the main image of Obama is the same. He presents himself as a man of optimism, unity and seeks to empower people.

4.5 John McCain interview on CBS' 60 Minutes with Scott Pelley 18/09-2008.

The analysis below is based on the second part of the interview where the topic moved from the financial crisis to foreign policy and the climate debate.

Self presentation:

McCain presents himself here as a man of great experience in a number of areas and uses this argument to justify his opinions and his positions “And I'm convinced of that from my many years of being involved in these issues from not just service in the military but service and in being involved in every national security challenge this nation has faced for a long time”. He has experienced fighting for the his country and thus understands the sacrifices of war. When the country is at war and you yourself have been fighting in a war for your country, it would only be rational to emphasise this part of your background. He also has great experience from working in Washington over a number of years. He claims however that he is not part of the people in Washington who want to maintain the status quo, but one who according to himself has great experience in reforming government “ I will also tell them I'll reform government, which I have a record of doing.”.

Finally he states that he has great experience in going against his party when his convictions tell him he should “And my record is fighting against my party and disagreeing with President Bush from time to time”. Here he compares himself with Barack Obama whom he claims has voted with his party on issues that he has really been reluctant to support “Senator Obama, from the time he came up through Chicago politics, has never bucked his party”. John McCain has gone through much tension with the Republican party and has prided himself on being more of an independent politician. McCain emphasises this by highlighting the times when he has gone against his party. This may not suit the base of the Republican electorate well and

may serve to alienate them. If he is to win over the Republican base voters, he needs to focus on what he has in common with them rather than the times when he has seen it as necessary to go against them. On the other hand, this interview was aired on national television in America and McCain needs to reach out to independent voters as well.

After presenting himself as experienced, McCain builds on this to present himself as honourable and trustworthy. His claim to trustworthiness is further illustrated by the support given by the mother of the soldier who was killed in action in Afghanistan: “I just went in the airport a couple hours ago. This woman was there. She handed me this envelope. Says, “My son, Staff Sergeant Patrick Lee Leibert, KIA, 21, June 2006, Afghanistan. Please remember and support our troops in Afghanistan. God bless you. Cheryl Patrick... Inside of it, of course, is the dog tag with Patrick's picture on it. That's what being President of the United States is all about”. This story is brought forward by John McCain to show that people who have friends and relatives fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan support him. The letter from this woman serves as an endorsement of McCain- at least that is how it is presented. It serves to underline his position that America cannot withdraw from Iraq without victory as it would be unpatriotic to quit. Thirdly, McCain presents himself as an agent of change “ I just think the American people want a change, and they want fundamental change”. This has of course been Obama's mantra as well and one that may be easier for him to present. John McCain is a white man who has served in the Armed Forces and who has served numerous years in the Congress- these are the characteristics of many Republican presidents. In order then to present himself as an agent of change that is believable, he focuses on the ways in which he would be a change from President Bush and a change from the Republican Party in general. This is emphasised by his claim of working in a bi-partisan fashion “Well, I think, first of all, working in a bipartisan fashion, which Americans want us to do now”. McCain actually claims that one of the greatest differences between him and Obama is his history of working in a bi-partisan way. Thus just as McCain uses his past to highlight his experience, it is used to back up his narrative as a representative for change in Washington.

The choice of Governor Palin had at the time of this interview lost some of its initial appeal and difficult questions were being asked as to her competency. In this interview when asked about her role, McCain builds her up by her association to him. He has established, and feels that America generally concurs, that the surge in Iraq was a correct strategic decision. Emphasising that Palin shared his view on the surge is meant to increase her credibility "...she shares the world view that I have. She shares a view of the world. She was for the surge in Iraq. So she understands Russia. She understands the threat that Iran puts that we face in the case of Iranian nuclear weapons. And she has the world view that I share. And I'm proud of that". It is in the interest of McCain's self presentation to boost Palin as the choice of her as vice-presidential candidate ultimately was his. Approval of Palin would reflect well on him. Obama and Biden's opposition to a policy that has been branded as a success is used to highlight McCain's competency and thus also indirectly Palin's in comparison with his opponent.

Foreign policy issues:

This interview focuses to a great extent on Iraq. There is little doubt that the surge was a focal point of the presidential election campaign. McCain paints a picture of himself as a president who would know what's best for the American people and one who stood by his beliefs, despite being told that the decision to support the surge and once again vote with President Bush, would greatly damage his campaign "When the majority of the American people believed we shouldn't send more troops to Iraq, I said we should. And many political pundits said my campaign was over". He followed his gut feeling and he was right. The question gives him ample room to emphasise one area where it is easy for him to depict himself as having made the correct decision on the surge and Obama the wrong one. McCain states that not only was Obama wrong in his decision, but he "moved to the left of his party". This type of statement attempts to link Obama with Communism which in the American context would be very damaging as it represents the evil that America as a force of good fought during the Cold War. McCain portrays going against the Republican Party on the surge as a

move to the left towards Communism and ultimately against the American national identity. Obama thus is unpatriotic and not a true American.

Pelley goes on to ask if the war in Iraq was the right war at the right time. McCain here has little choice but to reiterate the justifications behind his initial backing of the Iraq war in 2002/2003: “You know, I believe that Saddam Hussein was bent on developing weapons of mass destruction, and he stated that after his capture... And I won't recount to you again my role in that, which I am proud that I stood up for what I believed in”. He is not willing to admit that he was wrong, but chooses to focus on mistakes made by the Bush administration in terms of intelligence failure and mishandling: “But then it was grossly mishandled by Donald Rumsfeld and the Administration”, thus creating a distance between him and President Bush. He states that ultimately, implicitly referring to the surge, the wrongs have been righted. The surge is described as what steered America in the right direction again. He touches on the importance of the support of the people in going to war and by this wants to reassure the voters that he would not go against public opinion: “You cannot send American troops into harm's way unless you are absolutely convinced with overwhelming evidence and convince the American people. 'Cause unless you have the support of the people, you'll never sustain a long military involvement overseas. But you have to convince the American people”.

Pelley wants McCain to describe under which circumstances military force is acceptable and here it is important for McCain that he doesn't appear weak or soft. The American people are not going to vote for a candidate that they do not feel would protect them. Had the question been posed before 9/11 a different answer may have been acceptable, but 9/11 proved to the American people that America too is vulnerable for attack. McCain therefore has to assure the voters that he would do whatever necessary in order to protect America and American citizens in the face of threat: “So any commander-in-chief is going to take whatever steps necessary to protect America”. Another issue that was covered in the interview was policy on Afghanistan/Pakistan. McCain here clearly takes a different direction than President Bush in his eagerness to promote diplomatic ties with the Pakistanis regarding the

very difficult issue of American forces not being able to follow the Taliban and Al Qaeda as soon as they cross the border into north-western Pakistan “I think the most important thing is to work with the Pakistani government and convince them, as I believe they largely are and I know them, that the Taliban and al-Qaeda pose a threat to them as well. Tell you what I won't do. I won't do what Senator Obama said that he would do, and that is publicly broadcast my intentions to attack another country”. He attempts to increase his own credibility on making statements on this issue by referring to visits to Pakistan. The roles seem almost reversed here as normally you would have the Republicans criticising the Democrats for not being willing to be tough enough against other nations. Now McCain is eager to portray himself as more diplomatic and reasoning than Obama. This does show a concern for how the US is seen elsewhere in the world. After all, he is reluctant to go into Pakistan to avoid to “inflame public opinion against us”. In the same situation when being asked a very similar question, Obama has also emphasised the need for diplomacy, but has found it necessary to state that he will not take the military option off the table- probably for fear of being considered weak as the Republicans have been quite successful in branding Democrats just that in past elections (Ducat 2004). McCain does not feel the need to assure the American people that the military option is never taken off the table, possibly to mark the difference between him and President Bush.

McCain may not want to go into Pakistan to get bin Laden, but he claims that the US possess all the tools necessary to get Osama bin Laden “No. I'm telling you I can marshal all the tools that the United States has at its disposal so that we can come up with a coherent plan and bring him to justice”. It is important that McCain is convinced he can make sure bin Laden is captured when speaking to a population that considers bin Laden's capture crucial and is disappointed in the Bush administration failure to catch him. An assertive attitude is vital; the American people would not accept a president who said he did not expect to be able to find and capture bin Laden. The phrase “bring him to justice” is also important as Osama bin Laden is considered to have stood behind the greatest attack on American values and the American national identity and indeed on the free world. It is important to ensure that he will get Osama

bin Laden even if he can offer no specifics as to how. This also corresponds to the national myth of America as a beacon for justice and freedom in the world. Any attacker of those values must be brought to justice and McCain is here telling the American nation that he is the man to do it.

Appeals to national identity

In McCain's speech at the Legion the appeals to American national identity abounded. Here there are fewer. Of course the format of the interview does mean that the interviewer keeps the focus on the issues and allows less room for long embellishments on the American national identity, but that does not mean that you cannot use emotional appeals. McCain is rather appealing for people to trust him because of his honour, experience and his past accomplishments. It is thus more about convincing people to believe in the image of McCain as honourable and trustworthy, rather than telling the story of what America is and would be under his leadership. Thus his appeals become very person-specific and he may have failed to create that all-important connection with his audience. Scott Pelley does not come across as a hostile conversation partner in this interview. McCain is generally allowed to present his plans for the major issues in US foreign policy. In his speeches McCain tended to refrain from being very specific about issues and although he is careful not to get too immersed in details here, in this interview he is more concrete and explicit than he chose to be in his speeches.

4.6 John McCain interview with CNN's Wolf Blitzer in the Situation Room, 22/10-2008

The majority of the interview dealt with the financial crisis and social security, but towards the end, Blitzer turned to foreign policy and national security.

Self presentation

In this interview, John McCain presents himself and his identity almost exclusively against that of Barack Obama. In all the issues that are brought up, McCain starts by

blasting the standpoints and statements of Obama and then proceeds to talk about himself as the complete opposite. He faults Obama's standpoints on Iraq, Iran, Venezuela and Cuba, but does not make much of an effort to back up his statements: «He was wrong when he said he would sit down across the table from Ahmadinejad, Chavez and the Castro brothers. He was wrong about those». He expects his audience to accept his story simply because it is being told by him, a man of experience and honour. McCain seems here almost desperate to brand all of Obama's proposed policies as wrong and dangerous, but he gives no reason for them being wrong, the nature of these countries should serve as sufficient argumentation. Ultimately though, his explanations do not make for very convincing arguments.

The first question posed by Blitzer on national security asks if McCain believes he will be tested in the first 6 months of his presidency. Senator Biden had earlier stated that Obama would have to expect to be tested during the first time of his presidency, meant really as a reassurance that he was confident that Obama could handle tests that inevitably will arise. The clumsy phrasing was of course seized upon by the Republican Party. The question certainly allows for McCain to bring up Biden's mistake again. McCain here draws a clear distinction between the "untried and untested" Obama and himself. He states repeatedly, four times in the interview that he himself has been tested. McCain is implicitly saying that his record will scare enemies off, whereas Obama's inexperience will just encourage them. He uses the Cuban Missile Crisis to highlight exactly when he was tested although what he exactly did in that crisis remains unclear. McCain promotes his experience as the number one reason why he is more fit for the presidency than Obama. The question from Blitzer also gives McCain ample opportunity to indirectly question Obama's decision to appoint someone like Biden as his running mate, both in terms of his evaluation of the world situation, but also in terms of Biden's seemingly little faith in Obama. That the quote is taken out of context is of no concern to McCain as the quote on its own serves his purpose quite well. The aim is of course to portray both Obama and Biden as unqualified for office: "And I'm astonished and amazed to hear Sen. Obama -- Sen. Biden predict that the untried, untested President Obama will be tested by our

enemies... his own running mate expects Sen. Obama to be tested in that way? That's a remarkable statement, and that should concern all Americans».

Although we learn that McCain is opposed to most things Obama, we do not really find out what he intends to do instead. His experience should it seems speak for itself. McCain will inevitably be compared to President Bush, as they represent the same party. Even though McCain is comfortable being on Bush's side regarding the surge, this sentiment does not extend to other issues as President Bush is widely disliked and had low approval ratings towards the end of his presidency. McCain is very clear on creating counter-discourses to Obama's platform, but fails here to do the same with Bush. If he doesn't state exactly what he will do differently from Bush then as as they are from the same party, most people will assume that there will be little difference. McCain has portrayed himself as an agent of change, but in order to be convincing, he cannot focus on Obama- it is not Obama's policies that America wants a change from. It is quite natural for McCain to criticise Obama's standpoints as he is the opposition, but if he wants to remove himself far from the Bush administration he has to create strong counter-discourses to the Bush discourses. Of course there is a fine line between creating a distance between himself and an unpopular president in order to appeal to independent voters and alienating the Republican base voters who presumably is the part of the population that still supported President Bush in 2008.

McCain will naturally be reluctant to give clear answers as to his stand on specific issues that could backfire if he is elected president. Obviously it would not be in his interests to make commitments it would be difficult to honour later on. However, he has to strike a balance between being non-committal and seeming so vague people don't get a sense of what he is planning to do. When asked if he would honour the status of force agreement that the Bush administration was close reaching with the Iraqi government at the time of this interview, McCain does not go into details about the agreement except to say that it was «conditions based», whatever those conditions are. McCain rather chooses to try to give credibility and legitimacy to his response by quoting the American ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, basically letting the ambassador's position answer the question: "And Ryan Crocker, our ambassador in Baghdad,

said if you want to know what victory looks like, look at this agreement. So you know better than that, Wolf. You know it's conditions-based, and that's what the big fight was all about».

McCain is hoping that by associating his position with people whose opinion is greatly valued, he can remove himself from the question without being forced to give a definite answer. However, Blitzer continues to ask if McCain would accept the agreement. At this point McCain still refrains from answering and decides to launch another attack on Senators Biden and Obama and their stances on Iraq, a topic he is far more comfortable talking about: “And it's very clear to any observer now that if we had done what Sen. Biden wanted to do, break Iraq up into three countries, if we had done what Sen. Obama wanted to do, which was immediate withdrawal and setting firm dates for it, we would have probably been defeated in Iraq». It is difficult for McCain to agree to a withdrawal from Iraq as he feels it makes the Americans look like losers when so many American lives have been lost and so much resources have been spent. McCain backed the war and so for his reputation as a politician, it is vital that the war in Iraq is seen after the fact as ultimately won even if the sacrifices were greater than first anticipated.

Emotional appeals

In terms of emotional appeals in this McCain interview, there are plenty of appeals to fear. The danger of electing Obama as he would attract trouble like a magnet. The fact that the threats from the likes of Iran, Venezuela and Cuba are so great that starting talks with them would only increase the threat. The possible catastrophe of decisions Obama may make if he is elected president. McCain is here playing on the discourse of fear, almost stating that the choice of Obama as the next American president will lead to an attack on America and he is able to use Biden's remark to illustrate this and show that it is not only the Republican party that thinks so. These sentiments will no doubt echo the thoughts of many of the Republican base voters who are strongly suspicious of Obama. However, this appeal to fear only may not motivate these base voters enough to turn out on election day to vote, nor will they convince independents

to choose McCain as his conclusions are not backed up with any evidence or examples. You may have their attention, but if you cannot invoke their enthusiasm as well, they are unlikely to vote for you. And blasting Obama alone will not create that enthusiasm.

There are few references to national identity and indeed it is hard to decipher any appeal to social identities at all, apart from anti-Democrat, anti-Obama sentiments. There is a reference to the danger of talking to Cuba which may be linked to McCain's example of the Cuban Missile Crisis as one of many sources of his experience, but although Cuba once evoked strong feelings for Americans, certainly throughout the Cold War, this may not be as great a primer for national identity any more. It held far more salience when the primary enemy to the American nation was the Soviet Union and really all things communist including Cuba.

In this interview, the CNN journalist is both audience and conversation partner and in order to create a bond with him, McCain repeatedly refers to him as «his friend» and on first name basis thus giving the impression of a certain intimacy, of people who are on the same page. He also makes sure he compliments Blitzer on the questions he has asked in the interview: “And by the way, you still the best and toughest questions more than anybody. So I'm glad to be on with you again”. He also refers to «friends» in plural, possibly targeted at the television audience as a whole, once again trying to establish that connection and decrease the distance between him and the audience. Bill Clinton when he ran for president against George Bush Sr. was eager to present himself as a man of the people. McCain is trying something of the same tactic. Being someone's friend implicitly means knowing them and looking out for their interests, which of McCain wants to be perceived as doing.

This interview consists in large parts of negative campaigning. In general the Republicans rely more heavily on this than the Democrats do, who in turn seem to benefit more from positive campaigns. McCain fails to present the clear vision that he

has for America, focusing more on what Obama would do and therefore he himself would not. Marketing-wise this is not a good strategy. If there was a better balance between criticising Obama and then presenting his own plans, he would better have achieved his goals with this interview. After all, the purpose must be to tell the story of why he would make a better president than Obama. It is also interesting to note that earlier on in the interview, Blitzer brings forth a comment from a Republican who had now decided to vote Democrat due to McCain's negative campaigning «He normally says he votes Republican, but he says you lost his vote this time because of what he called negative campaigning». Although overall limited amounts of negative campaigning was visible in McCain's speeches and interviews chosen for this thesis, it dominated his advertisement campaigns and this is what is referred to here.

4.7 Barack Obama interview on CBS' 60 Minutes with Steve Kroft, 17/09-2009

The analysis below is centred on the parts of the interview that dealt with topics of national and foreign policy.

Foreign policy issues:

The first question on national security and foreign policy concerns Iraq and the surge and conforms to the political discourse set by the Bush administration that the surge has been a success. Barack Obama did not support the surge and expressed at the time that too much was already invested in Iraq and that the solution was not to send more troops. When it became clear that the surge seemed to have had positive consequences in terms of reduction of violence, it would only be natural that he be confronted with his opposition to the surge by the media and the political opposition. In his answer Obama makes sure that he pays tribute to the troops and General Petraeus for their efforts and seems to fully acknowledge that the surge has been successful “and they have performed brilliantly -- and General Petraeus, who just recently moved on to become the head of CENTCOM, is to be congratulated for his great work». He attributes the reduction in violence to the troops and General Petraeus which fits in

with the discourse of pride in the military that is such a big component of the American patriotism. That way he is making sure that he differentiates between the troops and Bush administration's military strategy in Iraq.

Although the military success is acknowledged, his answer does not give you the impression that he admits his decision not to back the surge was wrong. Rather, he suggests that the main reason why he was against the surge in the first place was that the political component of that particular attempts at a solution was lacking and that now that the surge has been carried and been hailed for its success, little has actually been achieved on the political level «but the truth of the matter is we still don't have an oil agreement. We still don't have provincial elections. The commanders on the ground themselves acknowledge that the political progress that's needed has not been made». In justifying his position, he brings in American tax payers and American military families that “have sacrificed enormously” during the war in Iraq. He refers to opinions stated by “commanders on the ground” that the political progress that is needed has not occurred which would serve to further legitimise his position that the surge was limited in its success as reduction of violence goes hand in hand with political integration in order to achieve stability in Iraq: «What we know is that the only long-term solution in Iraq is a political accommodation between the Shia, the Sunni, and the Kurds». Obama is careful not to buy into the discourse that surge was the solution to all problems in Iraq the way it has been presented by the Bush administration. Rather he highlights the qualities of the surge that have been lacking and that he intends to correct when he is elected president. Further, he elevates his concerns to be of the out most importance- almost greater than the reduction in violence and thus minimises the actual gains of the Bush administration's victory.

Iran also becomes a focal point in this interview. Predictably, Obama states that a nuclear armed Iran would indeed be considered a threat to the US when asked this by Kroft. Many Americans do perceive Iran to be a great threat to the US and it is important that Obama makes it clear that he shares that concern. In the question though, there is no mention of Israel, yet Obama immediately includes Israel in his

answer « Yes. I think that a nuclear-armed Iran is not just a threat to us, it's a threat to Israel», both highlighting the strong bonds between the US and Israel and that the discourse in the US on Iranian nuclear power inextricably is linked to Israel. It almost becomes a domestic issue where American and Israeli soldiers are interchangeable «Do I allow some rogue terrorist group to capture U.S. military -- if it was US soldiers involved -- without taking appropriate action? Of course not». Like on the issue of Al Qaeda, it is important for Obama to appear strong and capable and for many Americans that means never ruling out military power. However, Obama highlights his conviction that tough diplomacy can play a vital role. Saying straight out that he would attack Iran if they do not conform to international norms regarding nuclear arms would create obligations and promises that it would be hard to back down on in the future without seeming inconsistent. He implicitly states that President Bush has been wrong in his decision not to take the diplomatic route and uses Bush's own admission of this to back up his argument «And we have not applied the kind of tough diplomacy over the last eight years that I think could have made a difference. The Bush administration in its final year has started to change its mind».

Self presentation

An interview is a process, a conversation between interviewer and interviewee and thus will be heavily influenced by this relation. In this instance, Obama did not meet a particularly hostile interviewer. Steve Kroft does not really question his responses and although he asks some follow up questions in order to clarify for instance Israel's right to defend itself, such questioning is not really representative for the interview as a whole. Obama thus had ample room to manoeuvre the answers as he pleases and actually rephrases a question where the interviewer has used wording that makes Obama seem quite aggressive and uncompromising in his determination to breach Pakistani sovereignty by following the Al Qaeda back into Pakistan: "Here's what I said. Is that we can't tolerate al Qaeda having base camps and safe havens where they are planning attacks against U.S. Targets... And what I've also said is if we have a high value al Qaeda target in our sights, then we need to make sure that if the Pakistanis are unwilling or unable to go after them, that we do».

Obama words the statement somewhat differently by leaving it implicit what exactly he would do in order to crack down on Al Qaeda strongholds in Pakistan. However, he is also careful to avoid seeming weak by stating that if the Pakistanis are unwilling to go after the Al Qaeda, then he will. National security is a great concern for the American people and thus anyone who wants to be president must appear tough enough. The war on terror is also for Americans a war on threats to the American national identity. The American people will not vote for a presidential candidate whom they believe is not strong and tough enough to protect these values. Indeed research suggests that Republicans tend to win election when national security is of great concern to the American people as they appear tougher and more relentless in their ability and determination to protect America. Obama has to make sure he is not considered weak. At the same time, he is convinced that diplomacy and multilateralism can solve most issues and thus must attempt to marry the two convincingly. He describes his position on the possibility of going into Pakistan as «common sense», so something that is quite natural and the obvious choice. Opponents of his position (like McCain) are portrayed as ignorant.

In an interview that focuses on an issue where the two presidential candidates disagree vehemently, that issue can be used to further exacerbate those differences. On talking about Iraq, Obama finds it useful to highlight the history of the Iraq war which has been marred by poor decision making by the Bush administration and supported by John McCain «You notice that according to the McCain mythology, I guess the Iraq war started with the surge. They seem to forget that there were five years before that where they got everything wrong». He lists criticisms of the Iraq strategy as this helps put the surge into a long term perspective that flatters Obama's opposition to the Iraq war in the first place and accentuates McCain's general tendency to vote in favour of Bush. He uses the word «mythology» to highlight McCain's statement as something made up, a story that is not true and thus branding him as unserious. Obama even emphasises President's Bush move towards withdrawal in order to show that McCain is alone in his resolve the stay in Iraq. He paints the picture of a man who is stuck in the past and who will not lead America forward but rather stagnate America.

In talking about his plans for Afghanistan where Obama maintains the real war of terror is to be fought, he is able to give the impression of himself as someone who is already active in the process as he highlights his meetings with President Karzai of Afghanistan «You know, when I met with President Karzai, I insisted, "We've got to do something about the corruption». He shows himself as someone who is hands on and active and who has clear ideas of what needs to change. This forms an important part of his self presentation. He has called for brigades whereas John McCain wanted to “muddle through”. Overall, Obama is able to reify his intention to focus on Afghanistan, engage in diplomacy both in relation to Pakistan and Iran and express his determination to stand by Israel in the future although he does not state how far he will go. He is also able to counter the McCain campaign’s strategy to smear Obama because of his decision to not support the surge by making success in Iraq more about political progress and integration and less about reduction of violence through military operations. Thus he is not forced to participate in the discourse of the surge as the solution in Iraq.

Obama uses «commander in chief» to highlight both the position he would have as president as the one in charge, but also somehow the responsibility that comes with that job. Protecting American interests is the prime priority of the job and if that means going into Pakistan as a last resort then that’s what he will do. He brings the war on terror back to the attacks on 9/11 and says that «if someone strikes us and kills 3000 Americans there can be no safe harbour for them». This is a statement that seeks to stir up patriotic feelings in the American people as 9/11 led to an enormous surge in American patriotism. Obama implies that McCain would not go to the same lengths to bring the terrorists to justice which ultimately would mean he does not have the qualities needed to be president of the United States of America.

Obama taps into issues and values that resonate deeply with the American people, like right to defend yourself, respect for American troops, being a strong leader in the world, responsibility, achieving justice and the special bond with Israel. All these

focal points form part of the discourse of American national identity, a discourse that anyone running for office in America should conform to. These are the appeals to emotion that are made in the interview and what connects Obama with the audience. Further he makes his position on Israel very personal and brings it closer to the American people by bringing his daughters into his answer «And you know, so what I try to do is to use the same criteria in judging Israel's actions as I would if I were thinking about my daughters under potential Katusha rocket fire». His statement intends to convey the message that “I am just like you- a father protecting his daughters”. This taps into the discourse of family that remains an important tenet of the American national identity. It also places Obama as any other American, thus eliminating the distance between him and the voters.

4.8 Barack Obama interview with Bill O'Reilly on Fox News' The O'Reilly Factor 4/09-2008.

The transcript here is taken from the first in a series of four interviews on the Bill O'Reilly Show on Fox News, chosen as it dealt specifically with foreign policy and national security.

Foreign policy issues

The Republican Party is known for being tougher in particular in terms of military issues and in the climate of this interview Obama has to be careful not to appear soft or weak. This is evident throughout the interview Bill O'Reilly is quite aggressive in his interviewing style and asks exactly what Obama would do if his first tactic of diplomacy with Iran does not work. In this context Obama is forced to state that he would not rule out military power «It is sufficient to say that I would not take a military option off the table and that I would never hesitate to use our military force in order to protect the homeland and the United States of America's interests». His use of the phrase “here's where you and I agree” underlines the disagreement between the two on most issues and Obama here is trying to focus on the common ground. He is careful though

not to make any promises and the circumstances where military power would be an option remain elusive. Obama here has to counter the perception by a lot of Republicans and people on the fence who are worried about Iran that he would not be able to deal effectively (meaning militarily) with Iran. At the same time he has to stay true to his philosophy that diplomacy and more cooperation with other nations is the way forward.

There are strong norms of possession of nuclear weapons in the international community which is what Obama refers to when he states that Iran acquiring nuclear weapons would be a «game changer». He invokes not American values as such but international values about nuclear weapons that America has been instrumental in establishing. Bill O'Reilly is not satisfied with Obama's statement that he would not "take the military option off the table". Statements about diplomacy is not what he wants to hear. However, Obama although clear that military power is always an option, states that European cooperation is the primary route he will be taking. He implicitly criticises the Bush administration for failing to do this earlier «But where I disagree with you is the notion that we have exhausted every other resource because the fact of the matter is that for 6-7 years this administration... we weren't working as closely as we need to with the Europeans to create».

The interview then turns to Iraq and O'Reilly states that history has shown it to be the «wrong battlefield», meaning that Obama was correct in his assessment back in 2002/2003. He moves on to the surge and demands that Obama admit to being wrong in his opposition to it: «So why can't you just say that I was right in the beginning but I was wrong about this surge?». Bill O'Reilly follows the discourse set by the Bush administration that the surge was the only right option and that the consequences of it has been only positive and that it even has defeated Al Qaeda. Obama is in his answer careful to pay homage to the troops and to General Petraeus «I think that there is no doubt that the violence is down, I believe that that is a testimony to the troops that we sent and General Petraeus... I think that the surge has succeeded in ways that nobody anticipated including President Bush and the other supporters», but takes victory away from the strategies of the Bush administration by listing other variables that contributed like Sunni awakening and Shia losses which critics of the surge have highlighted: «Now, it

had gone very well, partly because of the Anbar situation, and the Sunni awakening, partly because the Shia lost in the surge».

Bill O'Reilly also taps into another Bush discourse, namely that the surge has not only reduced the violence, but even defeated the terrorists in Iraq. Bill O'Reilly goes on to point to the fact that if Obama and Biden had been in power at the time when this surge was proposed, there would not have been a surge and the only positive military development in Iraq for a long time would not have occurred. Obama tries to justify his stance by pointing to the years that preceded the surge with successive unsuccessful policy choices «Because there is an underlying problem with what we've done. We have reduced the violence but the Iraqis still haven't taken responsibility and we still don't have the kind of political reconciliation we need». Obama here suggests what he would consider to be the way forward: pressuring the Iraqis to take more responsibility. However, he is forced to admit that the surge has been successful in bringing the violence down.

In America there is certain dissatisfaction with other NATO countries and the general perception is that the US carries the brunt of NATO operation and O'Reilly presents the same opinion: «OK, Nato doesn't fight in Afghanistan, the Germans won't fight, the French won't fight, ok it's new with Sarkozy, but the Germans won't fight and a lot of the others won't so it's all down to us again... Why won't the Germans fight against the Taliban?». This view represents a tension seen within NATO between the US and especially Western European member states. Obama toured several European countries in the summer of 2008 and many Europeans are optimistic that Obama as president would represent a new perspective from America- one with more focus on cooperation and receptiveness to European concerns and priorities. Republicans ridiculed this European visit and Obama clearly states in this interview that he perceives O'Reilly to belong to this group: «Which, and a lot of your buddies had a good time making fun of». Obama goes on to state that the Bush administration is to blame for this reluctance from European countries to participate to the extent that the Americans want. Obama does express that he shares the view that the Europeans have to "step up" but that a different tactic from Bush's would be more efficient and more

or less promises that there will be a change.

A contentious issue in Europe has been the planned missile shield in Eastern Europe and the plans have certainly led to a serious worsening in the relationship between Russia and the US. Obama does not express any opposition to this Bush policy decision. O'Reilly clearly expected differently and wants a promise that the missile shield will be implemented. Obama does however leave one exit route open for himself- namely that it will only be implemented if it is proven to work «I believe that the missile shield is appropriate, I wanna make sure it works though, I wanna make sure». Obama refers back to the Georgia-Russian war of summer 2008 as proof that the missile shield is necessary to show Russia that they cannot control the area that was formerly Soviet. The missile shield becomes a way of showing power and strength over Russia even though the Americans have never admitted that the shield will represent any sort of US threat towards Russia. Rather what Obama expresses is that the US will help countries in Russia's near abroad to be freed of Russian influence. This attitude speaks of how America sees itself in the world; as a source of good, fighting oppression and injustice. The shield which officially at least was never about Russia becomes a symbol of American strength and powerful influence in the states that Russia considers its near abroad.

Self presentation

This interview was clearly with a far more hostile and aggressive interviewer than CBS' Steve Kroft and this is evident in Obama's self presentation. Where Kroft allowed him to rephrase and at times slightly change the parameters of the question, here it is rather Obama who has to conform to O'Reilly's rules. Obama has to make more concessions on his position on the surge than in the other interview and has to go further in his determination to use force against both Iran and Pakistan if necessary. He is not allowed the long explanatory answers he was at CBS, but is rather interrupted often. He is not allowed the long build ups of arguments, but has to give short and succinct answers, which could be difficult for him especially considering his focus on complexity and interconnectedness of issues expressed

elsewhere. Obama was however, able to remain fairly non-committal in his answers and for instance in the missile shield case, was able to set an escape route from his promise to go ahead with the shield. He is careful to state where O'Reilly is wrong in his statements and provides counter discourses so that O'Reilly's view does not go uncontested. O'Reilly presents himself as a protector of American values and someone who on behalf of the American people seeks to establish what Obama will and will not do as president.

Social identities

It is clear from this conversation that Obama and O'Reilly appeal to different groups in America. The social identity of potential and certain Obama voters is very different from the people who watch O'Reilly's programme and agrees with his views. Obama has no intention of alienating his potential voters in order to please voters who will never vote for him or any other Democrat candidate anyway. That would be unwise as the ground rule of campaigning is to get the base voters excited and on board. However, Obama focused throughout his campaign on unity and bi-partisanship and although the interview makes clear that they disagree on many issues, Obama is quick to point out where they do agree. He wants to show that he can talk people who represent different views from his. That is also a strategy of showing himself as a strong leader. If you cannot handle the tough questions of Bill O'Reilly, how will you handle difficult issues with less than cooperative leaders of states like Iran and North Korea? He may not have sold himself as well as in the interview with Steve Kroft, but he did not make many commitments outside his comfort zone either. O'Reilly is unable to brand him as soft the way Republicans often succeed in doing with Democrats. Obama's line on never taking the military options off the table is not one that was forced by O'Reilly in this interview, but one that was fronted in the CBS interview as well. Therefore it forms part of Obama's overall strategy in making sure he does not appear weak and overly compromising.

5. Discussion

5.1 Revisiting the research aims

Before I start the discussion it might useful to return to the aims of this thesis:

- To explore candidate self presentation strategies in the American presidential election 2008.
- To look for ways in which the candidates appeal to social identities among them the American national identity as a means for reaching the voters.
- To establish the ways in which the candidates depend upon emotional appeals to reach the American people.

I will first present a short summary of the findings of the analysis and will then proceed to look at Barack Obama and John McCain's strategies of self presentation and their appeals to social identities in more detail. Self presentation and appeals to social identity are not easily teased apart and the sections will inevitably overlap at times.

5.2 Summary of analyses

Obama's speeches focus on change, empowering his audience and optimism for the future of America. He draws on complex and overlapping social identities at both national and the global level. Although his speeches are steeped in emotional appeals mainly to national identity, he remains issue-focused and expresses discourses of national identity through issues. Obama seeks to link previously separated areas like the economy, national security and climate change. The overall message is to inspire

Americans to act in a difficult time and he makes use of powerful national narratives to achieve this. The interviews he takes part in are issue-oriented and focus on specific foreign and national security policies. Obama repeats the same standpoints on these issues in both interviews, although he is pressed further in the Fox News interview especially with regards to the surge in Iraq. In terms of self presentation, Obama makes use of issues that Americans care about in order to showcase himself and his leadership qualities. Overall, Obama's speeches and interviews come across as issue and people-oriented.

McCain's speeches are not as issue-oriented as Obama, but decidedly more character-focused. He presents himself as an honourable man and one with considerable experience. McCain tends to be vague on specific issues and relies heavily on his past accomplishments. In his speeches, McCain emphasises American greatness and America's rightful place as leader of the free world in order to invoke patriotism in his listeners. Thus he makes use of powerful national narratives. He positions himself explicitly against his opposition and spends much time distinguishing himself from Obama. He tends to appeal to narrower social identities, targeted specifically at his audiences. This is done in part by maintaining a single minded focus on one issue at a time. McCain's interviews are far more issue-oriented which may be because the interview setting is not one where he sets the agenda. In the CBS interview this works to his advantage; people want to hear about issues. The speeches are steeped in emotional appeals to the American national identity. In the interviews there are few. There are clear elements of negative campaigning especially in the CNN interview.

5.3 Self presentation

In this thesis I am arguing that the key to understanding self presentation is to consider the interaction between the actor, the audience and the context. Seeing as these variables interact, there will inevitably be some overlap, but I will attempt to address the variables separately and then to draw them together. Starting then with the actor, in this instance the candidates, I will look at the story Barack Obama and John McCain tell about themselves and what kind of president they would be if elected.

5.3.1 Agent of change

Change has been the mantra of many presidential campaigns. Franklin D. Roosevelt promised to bring change during the Depression of the 1930's. As did Ronald Reagan in the face of moral decline in 1980 and Bill Clinton at a time when many Americans were losing their jobs in beginning of the 1990's. In times when the American people feel disillusioned or discontent with administration, it makes sense to tap into this and show that you understand their concerns and will work to change policy. With approval ratings of George W. Bush low as the primaries started, it was no wonder change became the buzzword of the 2008 election campaign and especially for Obama whose self presentation portrays him first and foremost as an agent of change. There are several circumstances that make his claim to be an agent of change believable like the fact that he represents the Democratic Party and the nature of his voting record during his term in the Senate. Obama further backs up his claim to present change through launching a number of counter-discourses to those of the Bush administration. He seeks to nuance the view that the surge in Iraq has been only positive and that it is the surge that will ultimate allow for US withdrawal. Obama argues that the key to withdrawal lies in political accommodation which will not automatically occur as a consequence of the surge. Further he insists that diplomacy and multilateralism is the way to restore America's reputation in the world and a strategy that will actually lead to solving issues the Bush administration has failed to deal with effectively. Bush has defended his policies by stating that it is the only way of protecting America against external threats. Obama creates a counter discourse by stating that these policies have actually weakened American security, by directly antagonising the Muslim world through the war on terror, by weakening the economy disastrously and by failing to see the link between the climate crisis and national security as well as by the alienation of America's traditional allies.

George W. Bush built his vision of America around what Hughes describes as the myths of America as the Chosen nation, Nature's nation and the Millennial nation. Although there are elements of these myths in Obama's narrative of America, his

vision of America is more firmly rooted in the myth of the Capitalist nation through his insistence that the most important tenets of the American national identity is competition, ambition and a great work ethic. Where Bush maximised on the discourse of fear, Obama focuses on optimism and empowerment. Where Bush defended his policy choices as inevitabilities, Obama champions free will and choice. Atwater (2007) has looked at the rhetoric of Barack Obama in his campaign for the US Senate and in his speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2004 and found it to be dominated by optimism and empowerment and to be distinctly inclusive, aiming to give his immediate audience and America as a whole a sense of belonging to a broader inclusive community. The results of my analysis correspond well with Atwater and shows that there is continuity in Obama's narrative over time.

John McCain interestingly presents himself as an agent of change too. He represents change through his history of voting against his party and his history of being a reformer of government, thus he is tapping into widespread American disapproval of the Republican Party and of the way the Bush administration has run the American state. McCain is relying on a selective image of his voting record as a senator and is trusting that this selective account of his past behaviour will be considered the best predictor of future behaviour. The question is how credible this depiction of himself is as an agent of change is. He represents the Republican Party, has been a Senator since 1986 and has a record of voting with President Bush on most issues. Pitted against the other Republican candidates in the primaries, perhaps his insistence that he represents change was more convincing as he was believed to be able to excite both the Republican base and independent voters. However, compared to Obama who signifies radical change, McCain can at best represent modest change and on many issues perhaps not even that. Of course it is limited the extent to which McCain can be seen to represent change as too much of a change from the President Bush would most likely alienate the Republican base.

5.3.2 A man of honour

More central to McCain's self presentation and more understandable is his building

his narrative about himself as the old war hero. The cornerstone of McCain's self presentation is that he is an honourable man and that it is his experiences that have made him a man of honour. He uses his past in the armed forces to illustrate his honour and his years in Congress to underline his extensive experience. He associates himself with respected political figures and historical events to accentuate this experience. A large part of McCain's personal narrative is centred around his time as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. This ordeal in his life is cast as defining much of his character. Generally, candidates running for office have built their narratives around some adversary or obstacle they have had to overcome in order to get where they are now. Benjamin Franklin came from a poor background but worked his way up. Franklin D. Roosevelt did not let polio stop him from becoming one of the most iconic American presidents of all time. This obstacle then comes to represent something they have fought with and have beaten which has afforded them qualities that will make them especially competent as president. For McCain, this time of character building was while he was held captive by the North Vietnamese during the Vietnam War.

McCain has expressed that he thinks it was a mistake to withdraw from Vietnam and that some sort of a victory could have been secured, thus saving America's honour. In this campaign, Iraq almost seems like a new Vietnam to McCain as it is Iraq and then primarily the surge that is the foreign policy issue that he turns to time and time again. His support of the surge is used as proof that he knew what it took to turn the tide in Iraq. The surge also provides McCain with his number one criticism of his opposing candidate. McCain is very reluctant to support any plans for withdrawal from Iraq and it is clear that he considers victory to be crucial, perhaps to right the wrongs he believes were made in Vietnam. This means that the image he projects is more of a man who is led by the past and cannot let go, than a man who is able to adjust the present and look to the future. The focus on his past accomplishments is meant to act as assurance that his honourable character and experience means he will be a great president. He fails however to create a powerful story of who he will be as president as he remains elusive on issues. One is left with the impressions that he will

let the past dictate his future policy decisions.

5.3.3 Discourse of masculinity

Ducat (2004) argues that George W. Bush's presidential rhetoric represents a maximisation of the so-called discourse of masculinity in American politics. American politics has been largely an arena for men and competency and ability have been measured by ownership of qualities that have come to be associated with maleness. Ducat says that there are few places where men's fear of the feminine has been manifested more dramatically than in political rhetoric and behaviour. This has been seen especially since the 1980 presidential election as right-wing political propagandists have sought with great success to link liberalism to weakness, dependency and helplessness- qualities that have been constructed in male-dominated societies as feminine and therefore seen in the political arena as dangerous. Leadership qualities like strength, decisiveness and determination tend to boil down to the willingness to use military force. A significant part of Obama's self presentation is his hard work to avoid falling typecast as a typical soft and weak Democrat- emphasised by his insistence that he would never take the military option off the table in the case of Iran and also Pakistan. Thus the discourse of masculinity is one he finds himself forced to comply with and operate within. He does of course also focus on diplomacy and is reluctant to give absolute scenarios where he would use force against an adversary. He can however never shake the need to present himself as a supporter of military force as the ultimate weapon. Other discourses that Obama offers clear counter discourses to originates of course with President Bush and so are easier to attack, whereas the discourse of masculinity has wider and deeper roots in American politics. It is therefore harder to distance yourself from without being ridiculed and deemed inadequate and incompetent.

What Obama is able to do is present the unilateralism of President Bush as dangerous to the American nation as it has alienated important allies. Cooperation has generally been considered one of the more feminine strategies of American foreign policy, but by linking cooperation directly to national security and thus elevating its importance,

Obama may be able to weaken the dominant discourse of masculinity in American national security policy. The widening of the concept of national security by incorporating the importance of a strong economy and tackling the climate crisis can further contribute to this by weakening the absolute equation of national security to military capability. The discourse of masculinity is not one Obama endorses, but he is aware of its power and thus must consider it in his strategies of self presentation. He does not let the discourse of masculinity become central in his narrative of himself but he does feel the need to play along with it to maintain the image of himself as someone who would be a strong and decisive leader.

McCain is not as adamant in his intention to use force against Iran or Pakistan, although of course he is hugely sceptical of any talks with Iran. In terms of Pakistan he favours diplomacy and blasts Obama's statement about the possibility of sending forces into Pakistan if it turns out bin Laden is in hiding there. Thus McCain is not as afraid of falling into the trap of being feminised as Obama. It is of course Democrats that to a greater extent have been branded as soft and perhaps McCain does not feel he is at risk. McCain is also a war hero and it would be difficult to portray him as soft as toughness is often linked to having served in the armed forces. Other McCain statements though fit well with the discourse of masculinity, like his insistence that America must not withdraw from Iraq which would make them look like losers. Similarly, his insistence of the danger of talks with rogue regimes like Iran, Venezuela and Cuba, seeks to portray Obama as soft as he intends to engage in such talks. On the basis of my analysis then, one can actually say that McCain is contributing to the perpetuation of the discourse of masculinity. Where Obama may be uncomfortable with the masculinity discourse but recognises that he must find a way to manoeuvre it, McCain actually uses it in his favour suggesting that he is far more comfortable with it. It is a natural part of his narrative of himself and in his portrayal of Obama.

5.3.4 Discourse of fear

McCain spends much time focusing on danger in both speeches and interviews. The purpose is to present himself as the only one of the candidates that will be able to

deal with these dangers appropriately and thus extensive criticism of his opponent also forms part of McCain's self presentation. The danger of focusing on the financial crisis when there are terrorists plotting new attacks on America. The danger of voting for a candidate as inexperienced as Barack Obama as he is sure to attract danger as a magnet. The danger of withdrawing from Iraq. The danger of changing the Bush policy of refusing to speak to leaders of so-called rogue states like Iran, Venezuela and Cuba. Thus he is perpetuating the discourse of fear that formed such a large part of the presidential narrative of George W. Bush. It questions again the extent to which McCain could represent a change in the White House. After all, he is staying true to the Bush administration's strategy of relying on discourses of fear to achieve unity among the Americans. President Bush was able to uphold such a unity for a while, but as this strategy seems to have lost some appeal, it's is questionable how clever this McCain strategy is. Ultimately, exploiting a discourse of fear has a pronounced excluding effect where McCain is drawing clear lines between the in-group which is first and foremost America but also allies, generally other liberal democracies and the out group which consists of all countries that that do not embrace the same ideology. The categorisation of the world backs up McCain's narrative of the America as the leader of the free world, that is the leader of all liberal democracies. Where Obama is eager to present himself as as broad and inclusive a president as possible, McCain chooses to present himself as a more excluding president.

5.3.5 Tensions in McCain's self presentation

Great tensions are evident throughout McCain's self presentation. This is apparent when he talks about how he wants change from President Bush; yet the record shows that he has voted with him on most issues. He wants to market himself as independent; yet must be careful not to alienate the Republican base whom he depends upon. This is underlined by his choice of Sarah Palin as his vice presidential candidate. He has a record of voting against the Republican Party; yet now he is running as their candidate. As a consequence, his overall self presentation comes off as a bit confusing. Where President Bush clearly started with the Republican base and then was able to branch out to independent voters as well through setting strong

discourses about what should be American priorities, it is more difficult to go at it the other way around. McCain started off as a more of an independent candidate and moved towards the Republican base. He may have failed to excite either.

The tension McCain is displaying shows the complexity of party politics in America. Building on social identity theorists like Roccas and Brewer (2002) that claim that large social groups draw on symbolic attachment in order to prime social identities, it would make sense for politicians to draw on party identification in order to reach the voters. Yet in American politics in recent decades there has been a marked decrease in references to party by candidates running for office and a turn towards candidate focus. For McCain, it may make sense to reduce the connection between himself and the Republican Party especially when addressing independent voters as President Bush had low approval ratings towards the end of his presidency. But with the Republican base, any obvious alienation from the Republican Party could cast him as a delinquent member, something McCain has struggled with in the past and something he would have to overcome in order to get their voters. Obama however, does not make many references to his party either, which supports the literature that points to decreased party identification. In his case, the lack of references to party could be explained by his insistence that he will work in a bi-partisan fashion. A strong party-focus would go against such promises. In addition there are a number of labels that come with the party tag. For the Democrats this has in recent decades been being branded weak and soft, especially regarding national security. Freeing yourself from party identification thus affords you more liberty in setting your own discourses and avoids inconvenient historical references. This speaks of a paradox in American politics; you are chosen as a party's candidate, yet do not rely explicitly on party identification to secure votes.

Another tension that is apparent in McCain's self presentation revolves around his self professed honour. Americans are told to vote for John McCain because he is an honourable man. Presumably this honour has come from his experiences of fighting for his country and as president he will continue to fight for his country. Being a man

of honour might signify that he will treat the American people with respect and that he will always act for the greater good of America. The CNN interview consists mainly of negative campaigning targeted at his opponent. In the speeches and interviews I looked at in this thesis, this was the text where negative campaigning was the most evident. However, it might be the CNN interview that is most representative of the McCain campaign overall, whose advertisement campaign relied almost exclusively on negative campaigning. There is a distinct discrepancy between the image of a man of honour that McCain is so desperate to project and the negative campaigning he engages in. Surely this is not the behaviour of a man of honour? When McCain implicitly states that Obama is not “one of them” with all the insinuations that entails, this discrepancy is underlined. McCain fails to market himself as honourable and trustworthy- characteristics that are obviously important for him to project.

5.3.6 Incorporating temporal events

Just as important as it is to tap into the dominant social identities of the audience, it is vital to be aware of the context within which the audience operates. This will give clues as to what they consider important and which issues they believe should dominate the campaign. Although I have focused on self presentation related to national security and foreign policy, the issue that no doubt has engaged most Americans during the campaign has been the financial crisis as it has had such concrete ramifications for many of them. Newman (1994) points to the importance for candidates to assess voters' needs and identifies five dimensions of voter's motives, one of which is the dimension contingent upon temporal events. In this campaign that temporal event has been the financial crisis and Obama uses the financial crisis for what it's worth as a tool to reach his audience. A well marketed campaign and a powerful candidate not only seizes on such opportunities but forges new discourses which Obama does in his addresses to the nation by linking national security directly with the state of the economy and also to the climate crisis. Past presidents from the Democratic Party like Roosevelt and Clinton have won presidential elections through focusing on domestic, economic concerns and Obama

chooses to do the same. He keeps focused on the issues and uses the financial crisis cleverly to promote the image he wants to construct of himself as an agent of change, a unifying force and an optimist.

McCain on the other hand chooses to focus very specifically on himself in his speeches and interviews thus the self presentation is very direct and not primarily through issues as is the case with Obama. McCain is reluctant to talk about the financial crisis which is underlined by his lack of interest in linking it with other pressing issues like national security and the climate crisis as Obama does. McCain prefers to keep them separate and rather treats the financial crisis as something that will blow over, leaving the real challenges like national security concerns unsolved. Thus it is questionable whether he is able to maximise on the issues that Americans see as most pressing. Further addressing the financial crisis would mean criticising the American system which would go against McCain's general assumption that it is not the American society that is at fault- only the Bush administration.

5.4 Social identity

The purpose for tapping into social identities for the candidates is to establish a connection with their audience; the voters. In the analyses I found clear patterns of how the candidates used their self presentation to achieve such a connection. In general they tended invoke the American national identity, although they chose to emphasise different aspects. There were also appeals to other social identities, directed at specific audiences.

5.4.1 The AMERICAN candidate

McCain is explicit in his attempts to identify closely with his audience through focusing on how he is a true American and thus understands the American people. McCain's speeches and interviews are person-focused, trying to convince his audience that he possesses the right qualities and he forges links between his personal characteristics of honour, courage and being a believer in America and Americans. He attempts to equate himself to the American prototype as the embodiment of American

ideals and values. In his speeches, McCain tends to address narrow social identities depending on his audience, usually the American national identity and then one other social identity that overlaps well with the national identity. He signals that is he one of them by calling them “my friends”. He also extends his focus and refers to the national identity when he says “my fellow Americans”. In both instances he is signalling that “I am one of you- we have the same values and therefore I will be a good president for you” whether that is the members of the American Legion or the Americans people as a whole. The choice of words creates a certain intimacy with the audience. But it also draws of mechanisms of difference and exclusion. McCain's assurances that he is one of them implicitly means that Obama is not and then why Obama is not one of them is open to interpretation and will mean different things to different people. Is he not one of them because he's cast as non-Christian by forces in the Republican Party, because he is African American, because he has never served in the Armed Forces or simply because he is not a Republican? Is he not considered an American in the same way because he cannot possess the same qualities as McCain? The vagueness is intentional as this way the conclusions drawn by his listeners are fully their own and thus McCain cannot really be arrested for stirring racial hatred. He is drawing on their deepest, unarticulated prejudices. McCain's insinuations fit in with the overall discourse of fear that McCain is engaging in. It also ties into the overarching tension seen in McCain's self presentation as it clashes with his narrative of himself as a man of honour.

Where McCain favours few and often excluding social identities, Obama refers to multiple social identities through his speeches and interviews that interact and are used to draw different issues together. It is thus a highly efficient method for addressing multiple issues in one speech. Obama also appeals to a broader, global identity and talks of universal concerns based on global challenges. The overall image is that of an inclusive candidate who can appeal to multiple and complex social identities by linking the concerns of specific groups of people to wider understandings of how those concerns are interrelated. Central in Obama's campaign is his focus on unity and bi-partisanship. He seeks to downplay differences between

Democrats and Republicans so that America as a whole can pull together and overcome the challenges facing America, namely the financial crisis, the fight against international terrorism and the climate change. This choice points to an awareness of the fragmentation in American politics that has been observed by many. Obama claims that this fragmentation has compromised America's strength and that overcoming it is the way to beat the financial crisis. Beasley (2003) argues that American presidents have always in times of crisis sought to focus on what binds America together because they depend upon such a unity. Unity has been seen by presidents as crucial to achieve the goals they have wanted to achieve. Troy (2005) argues that the current fragmentation we see in American politics can be dated back to the Reagan years during and after which sharper divides have therefore appeared between the left and right in American society and politics.

Obama is seeking to overcome this divide and unite the American people with what he proposes is the cure for the financial crisis; Americans tapping into those inherently American abilities like ambition, hard work and competitiveness. This is the aspect of the American national identity he chooses to emphasise in order to unite a fragmented American people as these are qualities he perceives as binding all Americans together, regardless of race, religion and socio-economic background. In addition, he relies on Americans to bring out just these qualities in order to achieve what he has promised- to bring America back to financial glory. Obama seeks to get people to care about America through emotional appeals to national symbols. He wants Americans to realise that they are more alike than different. His is a strategy of inclusion, one that is explicit in its appeal to broad social identities. Where Bush will have alienated many with his emphasis on America as a Christian nation and one that excluded on the basis of difference in ideology, Obama refrains from adopting a policy of exclusion and emphasises inclusion by using “we”-language throughout.

The focus on unity is also meant to assure the American people that he will be a president for all Americans, regardless of race. He seeks to counter fears that he as the first African American president of the United States will first and foremost be a

president for African Americans. He doesn't refer explicitly to race, but rather focuses on things all Americans have in common, tenets of the American national identity. Thus although Obama does not explicitly make any reference to being African American, race still sneaks its way into the campaign. Obama must be careful to underline that he is American first and foremost, that he possesses those all-American characteristics and that as he has American values, he will be able to represent them all as president of the United States of America. In a way, this can be seen as a counter discourse to McCain's implicit messages that Obama is not a true American. Another reason why Obama favours the use of we is that he is signalling that he is one of them. Obama cannot allow race to become a dominant focus, but rather make sure that he is clear on why he would be the best candidate for the job based on specific issues and what he will do to improve the lives of the American people. Whatever social identities he may subscribe to, it is the national identity that is his primary national identity and the one that will dominate his presidency.

Although Obama is careful not to be presented as the African American candidate, the fact that he has become a symbol of the American Dream because of the obstacles that traditionally face African Americans implicitly creates a discourse of race in this election. The way such a discourse can work to Obama's advantage is by showing Americans that in electing him, America is closer to living up to the ideals of the American Creed which states that all are equal. The Creed may not reflect reality in America but it is important for Americans to continue to strive towards the America that is described in the Creed. Obama can therefore serve as confirmation that America is the greatest nation on earth. Indeed, on numerous occasions, Obama has himself stated that nowhere else in the world would his story have been possible. Where McCain attributed his sense of national pride to his time in captivity in Vietnam, this serves as Obama's ownership of being an American. This is what in Obama's narrative makes him inherently American. This is what has given him the full appreciation of what America represents and therefore why he is fit to be president of the United States. Obama therefore walks a tight balance between maximising on his background in order to cast himself as a symbol of the American

Dream and downplaying any fears Americans may have that he as African Americans cannot possibly represents non-blacks in America. His election can suggest that he was able to pull this balancing off sufficiently well.

5.4.2 Visions of America

Although both Obama and McCain refer to the social identities of sub groups in the American society in their self presentation, there is little doubt that it is the national identity that is most invoked. Thus they are both trying to achieve unity in the American people, even if McCain is generally less inclusive in his rhetoric than Obama tends to be. The candidates use their self presentation to define and redefine what America is. These constructions are based around already existing national narratives that the candidates tap into.

The American national identity described by Obama centres around the American dream. This is natural as Obama has made it part of his personal narrative that he is a symbol of the American dream. Indeed he is seen to embody the American Dream as he an African American who does not come from a privileged background, who has worked himself up and who now ultimately has succeeded in becoming the president of the United States. Colombo, Cullen and Lisle (2006) argue that central to the American Dream is the dream of success and they place the American Dream in the broader myth of individual opportunity where class is considered unimportant and where anyone can get rich quickly or indeed become president. Critics have argued that this flies in the face of reality, but the election of Barack Obama will most likely work to perpetuate this myth.

Obama focuses on the potential of Americans to overcome the financial crisis, they have the inherent ability to beat the crisis and get through difficult times. The characteristics of Americans he chooses to emphasise are competitiveness, ambition and great work ethic and these are the characteristics that America is crafted on and is why America has become the leader of the free world. This ties in well with the

capitalist myth as described by Hughes (2004). Obama is a believer in the American individual and in the national spirit and focus on these traits in the American national identity forms a great part of his self presentation. If he is to succeed as president and get America through this financial crisis, Obama depends upon these qualities to come through in the American people. He very much makes this a joint endeavour, not something that can only be solved by people in Washington. Ambition, individualism competitiveness and great work ethic make up the cornerstone of the myth of American capitalism. If you work hard and take advantage of the opportunities living in America gives you, you will be successful. Class and race are not important. The characteristics Obama asks the American people to show are characteristics that form a substantial of the American prototype and feature heavily in powerful narratives about America that Americans are fed throughout their lives. Colombo, Cullen and Lisle (1996) argue that class differences are often muted in order to strengthen the collective character which again ties into the tendency of American presidents and also Obama to rely on unifying rhetoric when addressing the nation. Obama's America thus is inextricably linked to myth of American capitalism.

The story McCain tells about the American nation is centred around general American greatness, past successes and America's position as leader of the free world. All Americans are great by virtue of being Americans. He depicts American values as the right values and also universal values. He attacks those who believe America must change and maintains that no change is needed as America is great as it is. The change needs rather to come in the administration. He focuses on the duty and responsibility America has in the world and on how America is seen worldwide as a protector of freedom. The American characteristics McCain accentuates are bravery and courage. Thus bearing in mind the myths identified by Hughes (2004) it is apparent that McCain draws on different American narratives than Obama does. McCain's narrative of America incorporates elements of the myths of the Chosen nation, Nature's nation and the Millennial nation whereas Obama focused almost exclusively on the myth of the Capitalist nation.

For McCain, America is a chosen nation because America has been elected for a special mission in the world, namely to be a beacon of justice and goodness and to be the guarantor of security not just for the American people but also for their allies. The justification for both domestic and international policies are made on the basis of this role of security guarantor. This ties in with what Hughes (2004) calls the myth of innocence meaning that the American cause in the world is a righteous one and that as a consequence America is innocent in the world. This myth became hard to defend after the Vietnam war but gained great salience after 9/11 and is according to Hughes the only one of the myths he describes that is without redeeming qualities. The other myths can serve some positive function as long as they are not absolutised, but the myth of the innocent nation cannot be justified. McCain describes America as the greatest force for good in the world and states that it is not America that needs to change in the face of recent criticism, but that America's righteous role will become apparent to the critics in times of crisis. America's history of success against adversaries and ideological opposition is used to prove that the American cause is a righteous one, that America represents good and the opposition evil. McCain refers back to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of Communism as the ultimate proof that America stands for all that is good and right in the world.

When the United States of America was founded in 1776 after the war of independence, America was considered by its inhabitants as the new world. After the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991, President George H. W. Bush called this the beginning of the new world order, meaning implicitly the American world order as it was the system of government that America had introduced to the world that had now conquered over Communism. This statement reflects Thomas Jefferson who said that the American government was a government erected on simple principles of nature. McCain's sentiments mirror these standpoints through his conviction of undivided American greatness. McCain is careful to state that America must not change, but that it is the American administration that has to. Here the myth of Nature's nation is also apparent in McCain's narrative of America as the way America is the way the leader of the free world ought to be- it is natural and self evident. Although McCain

calls for a change in the administration, it is important to note that he seeks to perpetuate the same myths that President Bush did. It is therefore difficult to imagine that he would represent a great change in the American government.

5.4.3 Religion

Starting on this thesis, I expected a lot of explicit emphasis on religion as was the case in 2000 and 2004. President Bush used religion as an appeal to social identity and further linked Christianity to the American national identity. In the speeches and interviews chosen for analysis here, there are few direct references to religion. That could both be due to the situation and audience. Both Obama and McCain had visits to church communities where obviously they will have drawn on their religion to connect to the audiences. However, that religion was not really brought into speeches and interviews shows that religion was less prominent in this election than in the last two. There were of course attempts by the Republican campaign to convince the American people that Barack Obama is Muslim seeing as his middle name is Hussein, which draws on the discourse that any American president must necessarily be a Christian and thus the most efficient way of assuring that people would not vote for Obama, would be to cast him as a non-Christian and what's more to associate him with Islam- the religion of terrorists. But where President Bush chose to incorporate religion into his speeches on national security and America's role in the world, both John McCain and Barack Obama refrains from doing so.

From President Reagan and onwards it has been the trend that the Republican Party has secured the votes of the religious right, thus this group of voters have been closely associated with the Republican Party. Indeed organisations from the religious right were very engaged in the 2000 and especially in the 2004 elections, campaigning hard for George W. Bush. Bush set an extremely religious discourse in his presidential campaigns and likened religion to moral and moral to the only right thing to do. Denton (2005) argues that both Al Gore and John Kerry struggled to keep up with a discourse they clearly felt uncomfortable with. Dionne and Bowman

predicted in a panel discussion hosted by Brookings (2004) that the 2004 elections represented the peak in religious campaigning and predicted that religion would be less prominent in the 2008 election. The results of my analysis supports this prediction. This could be due to a decline in participation of the religious right which in turn can be because they have been massively disappointed by President Bush' second term of presidency and feel he has let them down by failing to come through on the issues that made them vote for him in first place. They feel he has not represented them after all. Another reason can be that McCain is very different from Bush in that he does not sit so comfortably within the Republican Party and in terms of the religious right, he generally doesn't make the same explicit references to religion in his political life as Bush did. He is certainly a Christian, but has not fought specifically for the issues important to the religious right. Thus they are not likely to get as excited about him as they were about Bush.

Ultimately, religion did not end up as a defining discourse in the 2008 election. The Republican Party's attempts to portray Obama as Muslim did in the end not make enough of an impact to keep him from winning the election. McCain tended to slot in the expected references to God but they do not in any way dominate the speech. Obama made no references to God in the speeches and interviews I have focused on except for the standard "God bless America" at the end. Seeing as neither candidate used religion aggressively and worked to establish an explicit religious discourse, it did not dominate the campaign. Although the rhetoric is not explicitly religious as was the case with Bush it is still vitally important not to appear anti religious or anti Christian. With such a large proportion of the American population deeming themselves religious, you would have to show that you as president do not in any way appear anti-religious. If the attempts by the Republican Party to portray Obama as Muslim had taken root with a larger part of the electorate, this would have been seriously damaging to his campaign, but not as bad as if he had been branded irreligious.

5.5 Constraints on strategies of self presentation

The choices of self presentation Obama and McCain make throughout this campaign certainly speak of who they are as politicians and maybe also as people. However, the choices may say even more about the context within which they operate and that ultimately that the voters operate in as well. From my analysis what strikes me is how tied up with context the strategies of self presentation are. Beasley (2004) argues that rhetoric is not so individualised as one would think but is actually quite constrained. She draws on Foucault and Derrida and proposes that a strictly individualised perspective undermines focus on the speaker's agency which is not unlimited. Beasley describes presidential rhetoric as an ancient map, revealing paths of past users, paths dug deep enough to limit future travellers' options. Presidential rhetoric is thus highly influenced by contextual constraints, from both past and present. This is obvious in the numerous tensions that run through McCain's narrative and in the balancing act with regards to race that Obama is forced to engage in. McCain's tensions can largely be attributed to eight years of Bush presidency which has resulted in a divided Republican Party and an alienation of independent voters. Obama's balancing act speak of the politics of race that permeate the American society as well as a need to distance himself from powerful discourses set by the Republican Party depicting Democrats as weak. Here history and societal discourses act as constraints on the candidates' choices of self presentation.

In other instances though, they can represent opportunities for obtaining connections with the electorate like when the candidates invoke American national narratives that are founded on the American Creed and later reconstructed and redefined by previous American presidents. The narratives of America presented by the candidates underline the richness of the American national identity. Both Barack Obama and John McCain make powerful emotional appeals to national identity, but the complexity of the American identity allows them to draw on different aspects that suit their personal narrative, aspects that are all central to the story of what America is and that therefore resonate deeply with the American people. Although the context dictates the frame of the candidates' self presentation, it is clearly possible to manoeuvre within that frame. Being aware of contextual constraints and but also the

freedom, allows for the creation of strong personal narratives that can make powerful emotional appeals to the voter and convince them to vote for you. The trick is to use the context to your advantage. The financial crisis completely hijacked the 2008 election and the candidates had to make up their minds quickly on how to approach it. Obama chose to make it his central topic and married the financial crisis with both national security and the climate crisis to create a powerful narrative of who he would be as president and of what America would be with him as president. McCain on the other hand failed to maximise on the financial crisis and perhaps ultimately that is what lost him the election.

5.6 Evaluation of study

This has been a challenging project, not least because I have attempted to bring together many different academic fields that could shed light on the phenomenon of self presentation in American presidential elections. The foundation for my interdisciplinary focus was Schlenker's (2003) model of self presentation as interaction between actor, audience and context and with that as my starting-off point, I have tried to draw on academic work and theories to explain and contextualise the findings of my analysis. I have read widely, if somewhat superficially and believe that I have been able to bring some interesting ideas to the study of American presidential elections.

Although I started some of the analysis before November 4th- the majority of the work on this thesis took place after Barack Obama was announced the winner. I tried to immerse myself in each text instead of focusing on the election result, however it is impossible to rule out the possible effect the beauty of hindsight may have had on my analysis. I do feel though that I was able to do each text justice and that that my overall conclusions reflect the nature of each candidate's self presentation strategy. Although my sample of texts are representative for candidate self presentation on the issues of national security and foreign policy, I have of course not focused on the financial crisis, the topic that would come to eclipse the campaign. Its dominance was indeed so great that the financial crisis seeped into and in some ways dictated areas

that in the past have held their own, namely national security. Thus my analysis did not end up completely void of the financial crisis.

My decision to do textual analysis of interviews and speeches meant that advertisements was not analysed which obviously form a massive part of the campaigns in terms of emotional appeal and would no doubt have been fascinating to analyse. Constraints of time and space however, made an additional form of analysis difficult. I started off with very little knowledge and insight into the American context and have tried to gain an overview and a clear picture of what the American national identity is, if indeed that is possible. I profited immensely from a conversation with an expert on North America Studies and only wish I have initiated contact before as perhaps this could have guided my reading and made the task of reading up on the American national identity easier. Having said that, I have come across some gems in my somewhat exploratory reading that I may not have found otherwise.

5.7 Summary and broader implications

This thesis has sought to explore strategies of candidate self presentation in the American presidential election of 2008 by analysing speeches given and interviews participated in by Barack Obama and John McCain. It further sought to look at how candidates used social identities to create emotional connections with the American people. The analysis shows clear patterns of self presentation where the candidates seek to establish strong narratives of who they are and what kind of president they will be. Obama comes across as issue-oriented, drawing on broad social identities and as an agent of change and unity. He ties together multiple issues and uses them to showcase his personal characteristics. McCain's self presentation on the other hand is personality-focused with clear emphasis on his character. He appeals to narrow social identities and comes across as more excluding than inclusive as well as vague on issues. Both candidates seek to present their visions of America in order to connect with the voters and appeal to feelings of patriotism. They maximise on strong narratives of the American national identity, although they choose to focus on different aspects. It is important for both candidates to present themselves explicitly

as true Americans.

The purpose of this thesis is not first and foremost to generalise, but rather to shed light on a phenomenon that forms such an integral part of an event that fascinates people all over the world. By drawing on social psychological theories like social identity theory and theories self presentation, I believe a dimension has been added to the study of American presidential election campaigns and one that can contribute to a greater understanding of why candidates choose to present themselves in particular ways and which constraints they face. Future research should focus on a wider selection of self presentation forums such as televised advertisements and debates. It would also be interesting to see if the framework employed here could be useful in analysing future American presidential elections.

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a) John McCain's speech at the American Legion National Convention, August 26-2008
Full transcript at:

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2008/08/mccains_speech_to_the_american.html

b) John McCain's speech at National Security Roundtable meeting, October 30-2008

Full transcript at : <http://2008election.procon.org/sourcefiles/McCain20081030.pdf>

c) Barack Obama speech at the Clinton Global Initiative, September 25-2008

Full transcript at: <http://2008election.procon.org/sourcefiles/McCain20081030.pdf>

d) Barack Obama speech National Security Avail, October 22- 2008

Full transcript at: <http://www.asksam.com/ebooks/releases.asp?file=Obama-Speeches.ask&dn=National%20Security%20Avail>

e) John McCain interview with Scott Pelley on CBS' 60 Minutes, part 2, September 18-2008
Full transcript at:

http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/09/24/60minutes/main4476171.shtml?source=related_story

f) John McCain interview with Wolf Blitzer in the Situation Room on CNN, October 22-2008. Full transcript at:

<http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/22/blitzer.mccain.transcript/index.html>

g) Barack Obama interview with Steve Kroft on CBS' 60 Minutes, September 18-2008, part 2. Full transcript at:

<http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/22/blitzer.mccain.transcript/index.html>

h) Barack Obama interview on the O'Reilly Factor, Fox News, September 4- 2008

Available on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=753sLQQ8q8> and

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTcldaGj6Zg>